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Bell's Miniature Series of Poets

# DANTE

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## NOTE

ALL passages from Dante's works quoted in this volume, unless acknowledged in footnotes, are the author's own translation.

## THE LIFE OF DANTE

### I. MEDIÆVAL FLORENCE

THOSE who would seek to know Dante must know mediæval Florence. He was so essentially a child of his times that it is impossible to study him as an individual without reference to the period he lived in. No man has ever been more influenced by his surroundings and by political events. Before attempting to tell the tragic story of his life, it is therefore necessary to look back a little and see what kind of world it was that begat him.

Civil war was raging in Florence between Guelph and Ghibelline. The later history of this struggle became so complicated and puzzling that it is well to get a clear idea of what the original motives were. There had always been a rivalry between the Pope and the Emperor, but it was only in the twelfth century that Florence became the centre of strife. In 1115 the Countess Matilda of Tuscany died, and, prompted by the love of Holy Church, bequeathed Florence to the Pope, together with her other goods and lands. Florence instantly became a bone of contention

between Rome and the Empire, as, of course, neither side would relinquish the hope of adding so rich and valuable a possession to its dominions.

Later on those who espoused the cause of the Pope became known as Guelfs, while the partisans of the Emperor were called Ghibellines. Broadly speaking, the Florentine Guelfs were representative of the rising class of merchants, a grave people, hard-working and God-fearing, redoubtable by reason of their organisation and the money at their disposal. The Ghibellines were the nobles—turbulent, daring, and licentious, the natural enemies of the quiet citizen.

Thus in the beginning the parties were easily identified. Afterwards so many small quarrels were merged into the great hereditary hatred, so many private murders were committed in the name of Church or Empire, that the old clear distinctions were forgotten. It was no longer a struggle between Roman and Teuton. It degenerated into a thousand lesser struggles between family and family.

But fighting was in the blood of the Florentines. It did not much matter to them whether it were mere street rioting or an ordered campaign against a sister city, so long as it was strife of some kind. They conducted their wars with a certain barbaric splendour. So soon as hostilities were declared between Florence and any of her rivals, the great bell that hung in the archway of the gate of

Santa Maria was set ringing, and clanged day and night until the soldiers marched out to battle. The army was preceded by a scarlet chariot, drawn by bullocks. This "Carroccio" bore the red and white standard of the Republic flying from a mast.

It seems strange that the little Tuscan city could have harboured so many apparently conflicting forces within its narrow walls; still more strange that in the midst of the rioting which seemed the very life of the town the merchants could have carried on their peaceful commerce, quite undisturbed by the tumult. Florence was at heart a Guelf city, ruled by these same merchants through their seven great guilds. Gradually, and almost unobserved, they gained possession of the reins of government, and became so strong at last that the nobles were altogether excluded from holding civic office. In fact, the ennobling of a troublesome burgher was often a convenient form of ostracism.

But there was a third influence in Florence more important even than war or commerce. It was art. In Italy the profession of art was followed with a passion that was almost religious. The artist was called by God to become an artist, as the monk was called to the cloister, and his whole life was dedicated to his vocation. The first half of the thirteenth century beheld the birth of two great intellects who were to revive painting and architecture—Cimabue and Arnolfo Lapi. To the latter we



owe the beautiful church and first cloister of Santa Croce; also the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and the magnificent Palazzo Vecchio. All these buildings, which have made Florence for ever famous, were commenced before the dawn of the fourteenth century. Arnolfo also caused the outside of the ancient octangular baptistry to be adorned with black and white marbles, similar to those of the newly-designed Duomo. In fact, he did so much for his native city that it would be difficult to imagine what Florence would have been without him.

As for Cimabue, he was the earliest master of the greatest school of painting in the world. He was the first to cast aside the awkward manner of the Byzantine Greeks, and turn to living beings for his inspiration. His Madonna—now known as the “Madonna of the Rucellai”—seemed so marvellous a picture to the eyes of the beauty-loving Florentines that they bore it in triumph through the town. How strange a mixture of barbarism and appreciation were these citizens of the Middle Ages! The procession of Cimabue's tender Virgin enthroned among the sweet-faced angular angels was as joyous a festival to them as any return from victorious battle.

Giotto took up the work of Cimabue and Arnolfo where they had left it, for he was painter and architect and sculptor all in one. He was Dante's junior by a few years.

It is remarkable that Florence, which had already produced such famous masters in art,

had in those days no literature worth mentioning. Dante had no precursor; he rose like a star in solitary grandeur, the greatest Christian poet of all time.

## II. DANTE'S BIRTH AND ADOLESCENCE

Such, then, was Florence in Dante's day—a small warlike city, very wealthy, already very beautiful, highly civilised in some ways, in others still barbarous; a city where passions ran high, and love and hate were love and hate indeed. It was in the centre of this town, in a narrow street quite shadowed by the tall houses, that the family of the Alighieri had their dwelling. Here in the spring of 1265 a son was born to Alighiero di Bellincione degli Alighieri and Bella his wife. The child was taken to the Church of San Giovanni, and there in the dim Baptistry received the name of Durante, "the Endurer"—a name nobly prophetic of his life.

Alighiero was a Guelf notary, not rich, but of gentle blood. His wife died not long after the birth of their son, and the widower married again. The world knows very little about Dante's early years, and no enlightenment is to be found in the poet's writings, for he does not mention his parents or home life. Only in one sonnet he speaks tenderly of a girl, "exceeding rich in human sympathies," who was, he says, of his "very near kindred," probably his stepsister. Nothing is recorded of

the poet's history until the year 1274, when opens the first chapter of the most marvellous love-story the world has ever known.

Boccaccio tells it thus :

"In that season of the year when the sweet heavens once more clothe the earth with her adornments, and make her smile with many-hued flowers mingled with green leaves, it was the custom in our city for the men and women of the divers districts to hold festival together in companies, each in his own.

"Wherefore, it came to pass that among the rest, Folco Portinari, a man much honoured at that time by his fellow-citizens, had on the first of May assembled his neighbours for a feast at his own house. Among the company was the Alighieri of whom we have spoken, attended by Dante, who had not yet ended his ninth year. And it befell that mingling here with others of his age, both girls and boys . . . after the first tables had been served, in childish fashion he began to play with the others.

"Among the crowd of little ones was a daughter of the aforesaid Folco, whose name was Beatrice, who was then about eight years old. She was very gracious and pretty and very gentle in her manners, and more grave and modest in her demeanour and speech than might have been expected of her few years. Besides this, her features were very delicate and regular, and endowed, not only with beauty, but

with such comeliness and purity that by many she was held to be little short of an angel.

"She, such as I describe her, or, it may be, far more fair, appeared at this feast, not, as I suppose, for the first time, but for the first time with the power to waken love, before the eyes of our Dante, who, though still a child, received into his heart the beauteous image of her with so great affection that from that day forth, as long as he lived, it never departed from him."

Dante himself tells us in the *Vita Nuova* that "her dress on that day was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned as best suited her very tender age."\*

So the little Dante loved Beatrice, and as the years went by the childish love became a passion. Although they were neighbours, they seem to have met but seldom. The few occasions when the poet looked on the lady have been described in detail in the *Vita Nuova*, and the first time Beatrice granted him the favour of her salutation is recorded in one of Dante's most exquisite pages.

"It happened that . . . this wonderful lady appeared before me," he wrote, "clothed in purest white, walking between two noble women, who were older than she; and in passing down a street she turned her eyes towards the place where I stood in great fear; and of her ineffable courtesy (which is to-day rewarded in the unending world), she saluted me so graciously that I then seemed to behold the

\* Rossetti's translation.



uttermost bounds of joy . . . and because this was the first time that her words took wing to come to mine ears, I was filled with such ecstasy that I departed from thence like one inebriated."

It was after this meeting, in the year 1283, when Dante was eighteen years old, that he wrote his first poem, a sonnet beginning, "To every heart which the sweet pain doth move," wherein he described a vision that he had of Love and Beatrice. He sent copies of it to many famous poets of the day. Of these, Cino da Pistoia, Dante da Maiano, and Guido Cavalcanti replied by sonnets of their own. Guido, a Florentine Ghibelline, and perhaps the most celebrated lyrist of the age, became from that time forth, as Dante wrote, the chief of all his friends.

It is difficult to know the actual story of Dante's love for Beatrice. He who has in a way told so much, recording every little trivial event in the history of his emotions, has yet shown curious reticence on many points. Moreover, he has shrouded the whole story in veils of mysticism, wrapped it round with allegory, and filled it with tales of dreams and visions—a mental attitude which was perfectly usual in the Middle Ages, but which is puzzling in the present day. It is this which has caused some bewildered commentators to assert that Beatrice was not a real woman at all, that she was only an abstract ideal of religion or philosophy. But the more one studies the *Vita*

*Nuova*, the more improbable does this theory appear. If Dante were writing about an imaginary woman, is it likely that he would choose such commonplace actions to chronicle? Would he describe Religion or Philosophy walking in the street, laughing with the neighbours mourning a dead companion, or mocking her lover's distress? It is true that his secretiveness is amazing. He never mentions her family name, never records any actual words spoken by her; she pervades his work, a vital presence, nameless save for the title of Beatrice, "the Blessing Giver." Yet such reserve was nothing extraordinary, even at a much later date. It is not usual to deny the existence of Laura, yet Petrarch never alluded to her except in mystic terms, as "his Laura," "his laurel," "his fair tree," "his saint."

As regards the namelessness of Beatrice, Boccaccio, who saw the light some years before Dante's death, and who was intimate with all his family, positively states her to have been the daughter of Folco Portinari, a rich Florentine citizen. It is not known whether Dante aspired to wed her himself, or whether his passion was from the beginning of that detached and ethereal kind that is now associated with the author of the *New Life*. Several eminent students of the subject, amongst others Rossetti and Edmund Gardner, consider that at first he had hoped to win her for his bride. The alternating fears and longings which Dante expresses in chapter xiii. of the *Vita Nuova* may be urged

in support of this. He has sent a ballad to Beatrice, professing his entire subjection to her; then he continues as follows:

"Having written those words which Love had dictated to me, I began to be harassed with many and diverse thoughts, by each of which I was sorely tempted; and in especial there were four among them that left me no rest. The first was this: 'Certainly the lordship of Love is good, seeing that it diverts the mind from all mean things;' the second was this: 'Certainly the lordship of Love is evil, seeing that the more homage his servants pay to him, the more grievous and painful are the torments wherewith he torments them;' the third was this: 'The name of Love is so sweet in the hearing that it would not seem possible for its effects to be other than sweet, seeing that the name must needs be like unto the thing named, as it is written: "Nomina sunt consequentia rerum;"' and the fourth was this: 'The lady whom Love hath chosen out to govern thee is not as other ladies *whose hearts are easily moved*;' and by each one of these thoughts I was so sorely assailed that I was like unto him *who doubteth which path to take*."\*

It was probably just at this period, about the year 1286, while Dante was doubting "which path to take," that Beatrice was united to Simone dei Bardi. Dante never speaks openly of the marriage; one of his wonted silences shrouds the event, probably because the grief

\* Rossetti's translation.

was too deep for expression ; but most critics consider that the feast described in chapter xiv. was held on the occasion of Beatrice's wedding.

"After this battling with many thoughts," writes the lover, "it chanced on a day that my most gracious lady was with a gathering of ladies in a certain place, to the which I was conducted by a friend of mine, he thinking to do me a great pleasure by showing me the beauty of so many women. Then I, hardly knowing whereunto he conducted me, but trusting in him, who yet was leading his friend to the last verge of life, made question : 'To what end are we come among these ladies ?' And he answered : 'To the end that they may be worthily served.' And they were assembled around a gentlewoman who was given in marriage on that day, the custom of the city being that these should bear her company when she sat down for the first time at table in the house of her husband. Therefore I, as was my friend's pleasure, resolved to stay with him and do honour to those ladies.

"But as soon as I had thus resolved, I began to feel a faintness and a throbbing at my left side, which soon took possession of my whole body. Whereupon I remember that I covertly leaned my back unto a painting that ran round the walls of that house ; and, being fearful lest my trembling should be discerned of them, I lifted mine eyes to look on those ladies, and then first perceived among them the excellent Beatrice. And when I perceived her, all my senses were



overpowered by the great lordship that Love obtained, finding himself so near unto that most gracious being. . . . Many of her friends, having discerned my confusion, began to wonder, and, together with herself, kept whispering of me and mocking me. Whereupon my friend, who knew not what to conceive, took me by the hands, and, drawing me forth from among them, required to know what ailed me. Then, having first held me at quiet for a space, until my perceptions were come back to me, I made answer to my friend: 'Of a surety I have now set my feet on that point of life beyond the which he must not pass who would return.'"\*

"It is difficult," remarks Rossetti, "not to connect Dante's agony at this wedding feast with our knowledge that in her twenty-first year Beatrice was wedded to Simone dei Bardi. That she herself was the bride on this occasion might seem out of the question, from the fact of its not being in any way so stated; but, on the other hand, Dante's silence throughout the *Vita Nuova* as regards her marriage (which must have brought deep sorrow even to his ideal love) is so startling that we might almost be led to conceive in this passage the only intimation of it which he thought fit to give."

"Of a surety I have now set my feet on that point of life beyond the which he must not pass who would return." Such was the cry

\* Rossetti's translation.



*Rischgitz, photo.]*

GIOTTO'S PORTRAIT OF DANTE (RESTORED).

National Museum, Florence.



that broke from Dante when he fully realised that Beatrice was lost to him in this world. That is to say, "I cannot continue to love her humanly or I must die." Therefore, after the description of the marriage feast Dante seems to have crushed all earthliness out of his love ; it had "become a transcendental rapture, an ecstasy of self-annihilation."\* "I have spoken enough of myself," he wrote, "... it now behoveth me to treat of new and nobler themes." So henceforth all his poems are nothing but praise of Beatrice.

It is at this period of life that Dante is represented in the still existing fresco on the walls of the Bargello in Florence. The portrait is ascribed to Giotto, who was then about twenty years of age, and already a marvellous painter. Dante is depicted in profile. The expression is beautiful and very placid, like that of one whose thoughts were always lovely. The line of lip and chin is tenderly drawn, and gives a look of strength and sweetness to the whole face.

Readers of the *Vita Nuova* would imagine that all Dante's energies were absorbed in the love which he chronicles, but it was not so. He combined the active life with the contemplative ; he was a soldier as well as a poet. At the age of twenty-four he took part in a war against Arezzo, which ended two years later in a victory for Florence. The Aretines sent a mocking challenge to their enemies, saying that they had no fear, for they knew that the

\* Edmund Gardner.

many horsemen of the Florentines did nought save dress themselves magnificently and comb their hair like women. The taunt stung, and it was with an added fury that the armies faced each other on the plain of Campaldino on a Saturday morning, June 11, 1289. Villani says: "They were more perfectly ordered on both sides than ever were hosts in Italy before this time." Dante rode in the front rank and bore himself "like a hero," says Boccaccio. The Florentine cavalry were at first broken and driven back by the furious charge of the enemy's horse: but the luck turned, and, making a tremendous rally, they completely routed the Aretines. Dante wrote a letter describing the battle, in which he said that at first he had felt great fear and afterwards great joy, by reason of the changing chances of the day. In the same letter he spoke of himself as being at that time "no child in warfare."

Florence made much of its triumph. The city was fond of pageants, great ceremonials. Amid the shouts and blessings of the multitude the soldiers marched to the Church of San Marco to consecrate their arms upon God's altar. This was Dante's last year of joy. Victorious, with a soldier's laurels added to his poet's fame, he came home to lay it all at the feet of his lady. But within a few months of his return his lady died, and with her died Dante's youth. He mourned her with all the gloomy passion of the mediæval mind; he cut himself off from men, becoming almost savage



in his grief. Before Dante's unutterable sorrow historians fall silent. It was too deep and terrible to chronicle. After a long while he himself takes up the pen to tell us of the slow and painful recovery from his despair.

"When the joy of my soul was lost to me,"\* he writes, "I remained so wounded with grief that no comfort availed me. But, nevertheless, after a time my mind, which was desirous of regaining health, resolved (since neither my own consolation nor that of others availed) to have recourse to the means which a certain disconsolate man had used to console himself; and I set myself to read that book by Boethius which is not known of many, wherein, captive and banished, he had found comfort. And hearing also that Tullio had written another book, in which, treating of friendship, he had touched upon the consolations of Lælius, a very excellent man, at the death of his friend Scipio, I set myself to read that. And it came to pass that though at first it was hard for me to enter into their meaning, yet I at length understood as much as the little grammar which I knew, and somewhat of intellect which I possessed, enabled me to do; through which intellect I have seen many things, as it were in visions, as can be seen in the *Vita Nuova* . . . I, who sought to console myself, found not only remedy in my tears, but instruction in the phrases used by authors in scientific and other books, considering which I

\* *Il Convito*, trattato ii., capitolo xiii.

rightly judged that Philosophy, who is the mistress of these writers, is the greatest thing in the world."

It was about 1291 that Dante compiled the *New Life*. He collected all the verses he had written for Beatrice and wrought them into a book with a setting of prose that is almost as exquisite as his poetry. In the last page he relates how he has seen a wonderful vision, and says he will write no more concerning "his most blessed lady" until he is able to honour her with a tribute such as had never yet been paid to a woman.

In this phrase may be seen the germ of the *Divine Comedy*. But, alas! there was a sorry interlude before the accomplishment of that resolution, for shortly after completing the *Vita Nuova* Dante fell away from his high allegiance into the life of dissipation common at the time.

It dated from the year 1292, when he took Gemma Donati to wife. Boccaccio says that he was persuaded into wedding her by his relatives, who disapproved of the isolation he had affected since the death of Beatrice. The marriage was perhaps not an unwise act from a worldly point of view, for Gemma was a good, sensible woman, who looked well after the poet's affairs; but in Dante's ideal life it was a step downwards. It was not to be expected that there could be any great unity in a household where all the love that the husband had to give was dedicated to a dead woman.

Dante's first abatement of his spirituality brought him no blessing. Boccaccio firmly states that his marriage was not successful ; but as in all his writings Dante never mentions his wife nor the five children she bore him, it is very difficult to know the truth. Certainly, if the union were not actually an unhappy one, it gave no satisfaction to his heart.

But matrimony brought the following unexpected consequence. If Gemma had no power of binding her husband to herself, she was the indirect means of separating him for a while from the thought of Beatrice. A kinsman of the bride's, named Forese Donati, formed a close friendship with Dante, and little by little gained such an ascendancy over him, that he dragged the poet down to his own level. They spent their days and nights together in the pursuit of pleasure, and the memory of his gentle dead lady was crowded out of Dante's mind by a host of frivolous thoughts. There are four sonnets existing which date from this period—would-be witty taunts which the two friends exchanged. The coarsest of these verses is ascribed to Dante. It is strange to think that so poor a creature as Forese could have had this power over one of the noblest men of all time ; strange that Dante, with his pride of intellect, should have stooped to common pastimes with so foolish a comrade.

In this curious Florentine civilisation, correspondence was carried on largely by means of



poems. Guido Cavalcanti's versified reproach to Dante is still preserved :

" I come to thee by daytime constantly,  
But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find."

So wrote this true friend.

" Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind,  
And for thy many virtues gone from thee.  
It was thy wont to shun much company,  
Unto all sorry concourse ill inclin'd :  
And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,  
Had made me treasure up thy poetry.  
But now I dare not, for thine abject life,  
Make manifest that I approve thy rhymes ;  
Nor come I in such sort that thou mayst know.  
Ah ! prythee read this sonnet many times :  
So shall that evil one who bred this strife  
Be thrust from thy dishonoured soul and go."\*

Dante repented. He went back to his grave life and never fell again, but all his days he was haunted by a sense of how much he had to expiate. Forese died in 1295, and there is a legend which relates that Dante forced his dying kinsman to be reconciled to God. Years after, when the poet was labouring at his greatest work, he filled one canto of the *Purgatorio* with a public confession. On the slopes of the Purgatorial Mount, Dante meets a crowd of emaciated souls ; scarcely are their shadowy bones concealed beneath their skin. They are consumed with hunger, yet they rejoice with a holy joy. One of these spirits, slowly turning his sunken eyes, fixes his gaze on Dante, and

\* Rossetti's translation.

recognises him. A cry comes from the drawn lips: "Whence this grace to me?" At the sound of the voice the poet knows his departed friend; and there face to face they stand, both so changed, both sinners, both forgiven. They converse of the temporal world and the everlasting, of wrong-doing and repentance. Then Dante says:

"Se tu riduci a mente  
Qual fosti meco e quale io teco fui  
Ancor fia grave il memorar presente."

If thou recall to mind what thou wast with me,  
and what I was with thee, the present memory  
will still be grievous to thee.

Dante makes one more act of reparation in the same canto. As he and Forese while on earth had written with insulting triviality of Forese's wife, so now on the Hill of Purgatory they speak again of her, but with tender respect. Thus were amends made to Nella's memory.

### III. DANTE'S POLITICAL LIFE.

It was shortly after the Battle of Campaldino, in 1289, that a most important phase of Dante's life began: that of his political activity. Those were troublous times for Italy, and especially for that hot-bed of faction, Florence. The city's constitution showed a tendency to become ever more democratic. The lowest party, consisting of the very poor, known as the *popolani*,

had every year been acquiring fuller liberty, more consideration, until in 1289 a law was passed enfranchising the peasants. Government was then in the hands of six Priors, who were chosen from the greater guilds, and who were not allowed to hold office for more than two successive months. From 1293 to 1295 the Priors were strongly influenced by Giano della Bella, a noble turned reformer, who cleaved to the people and supported their claims against his peers. Under his supervision the famous "Ordinances of Justice" were drawn up, embodying very severe laws against the nobles, and appointing heavy punishments to be inflicted upon those who maltreated any of the *popolani*. A new officer, known as the Gonfaloniere, or Standard-Bearer of Justice, was appointed especially to see that these ordinances were carried out. Like the Priors, this Standard-Bearer was elected, and like them, also, might not hold office longer than two months.

Giano was contemplating still more sweeping reforms, when his career came suddenly to an end. The nobles and the burghers, united for a brief interval by their common jealousy, plotted to destroy the man who had grown too powerful for their taste, and after an unsuccessful attempt to murder him drove him into exile. The *popolani*, for whom he had done so much, looked idly on, and made no attempt to help their benefactor in his need. Fresh rioting between the merchants and the nobles was the immediate result of Giano's fall. Two new

parties were formed in distracted Florence, the Blacks and the Whites; the Whites being the supporters of the Democracy and the "Ordinances of Justice," the Blacks a survival of the old Ghibellines.

At this crisis Dante first came into real prominence. He took his place in the municipal council as a White, but he advised a modification of the ferocious "Ordinances." He was foremost in repressing lawlessness, in upholding the true rights of the people and the city; and, although a Gueff, he steadily resisted any political interference from Rome. Boniface VIII. had been made Pope in 1294—an ambitious, unscrupulous man, a strong ruler, whose aim in life was to render the temporal power of the Papacy as absolute as its spiritual authority. Boniface specially coveted the possession of Florence, and was plotting against the liberty of the city. While he thundered in Bull after Bull against the democratic party, he was secretly negotiating with three men whom he had in his pay within the town's very walls. A Papal plot to overthrow the State was discovered, and the Priors quietly and firmly sentenced the Pope's creatures to death. Boniface issued a fresh Bull demanding their instant release, and summoning their accuser to appear before him in Rome. At the same time he addressed a letter to Albert of Austria, commanding him to give up all claim to the lordship of Tuscany.

Although Florence was rent with civil war



and drenched with blood, the Government stood firm, and a Council of the Commune ordered the Priors to defend the liberty of the Republic against "all attacks whatsoever." It was in this dark hour that great power was given into Dante's hands. On June 15th, 1300, he was elected Prior, and instantly became the leading spirit. All his fellow-citizens were swayed by his masterful personality, and they unquestioningly yielded him the first place. His was the strongest intellect there, and he knew it. He promptly constituted himself the defender of Florence. The struggle that now took place was a struggle between Dante and his bitterest enemy, Boniface, rather than a fight between the Republic and the Papacy; and it was Dante who inspired the Signoria with that majestic reply to the Pope's demands: *Nihil fiat.*

On seeing the attitude of the Florentines Boniface changed his tactics, and feigned conciliation. He assumed the rôle of peacemaker, and sent Cardinal Matteo d' Acquasparta to reconcile the conflicting parties. Dante was unshaken. He knew the Cardinal had no true pacific intention. The mildness was only a blind to divert attention from a fresh scheme to overthrow the State. He therefore headed the Priors in refusing all that the Legate demanded. Whereupon the Cardinal saw nothing left to do but to ride home, and the Pope placed the city under an interdict.

Meanwhile the intestine troubles

greater than ever, and the Signoria adopted very severe measures in hopes of obtaining peace. The leaders of both the Blacks and the Whites were exiled in June of the same year.

When Dante gave his vote in favour of this measure he was consenting to the exile of Guido Cavalcanti, who was one of the prominent Whites. Dante loved Guido, and it must have hurt him to condemn his friend to banishment (which to a Florentine was the most dreadful of all trials), but no sentiment could prevent Dante from doing what he considered right. He prided himself that the "holy seed of ancient Rome," the founder of his city, was still living in the true Florentine; and, indeed, his idea of duty was Roman in its rigidity. He would have sacrificed his nearest and dearest for the good of his country. As for Guido, he went forth to meet his death. The White exiles were sent by the Priors to Sarzana, in the Genovesato, a place infected with malaria. A fever fastened upon Guido, and he died before the year was out.

The exiling of the leaders of the factions was the last important event before Dante's priorship expired. He had, however, gained so strong an ascendancy over his party that he continued to sway the Government even when he was not actually in office.

When Corso Donati, chief of the Blacks, was exiled, he went straight to the Pope and suggested foreign intervention. Boniface fell into his scheme, and sent Charles of Valois,

brother of the French King, to Florence, ostensibly as peacemaker, but in reality under orders to "subdue the Tuscan rebels."

When the news of the project reached Florence the citizens were aghast: they knew the Pope's peacemakers. It was then that the Priors committed an irretrievable error of judgment. They had been for some time preparing for war, as is proved by documents showing that Dante superintended the making of a military road in order to bring up troops from the country. Yet the Priors decided to make at first no show of armed resistance, but to meet Boniface on his own ground. They therefore attempted diplomacy, and agreed to send an embassy to Rome to protest against the coming of the French. The Signoria were anxious to send Dante, who was their most valued spokesman, but he, well knowing that if he went he would leave the vessel of the State without a pilot, uttered the memorable words: "If I go, who remains? If I remain, who goes?" Finally deciding however that his presence was more necessary at Rome than at home, he left his beloved city, never to return.

At the end of October, while Dante was still treating with the Holy See, Charles of Valois appeared with twelve hundred horsemen before the gates of Florence. The frightened Priors held a parliament at Santa Maria Novella. Overawed by the sight of the French cavalry, and lacking the vitalising presence of Dante, they decided to admit the

"peacemaker." Charles gave solemn pledges of his good intentions, and on November 1, 1301, he and his armed troops rode into the town. No sooner had he effected an entry than he flung off the mask. The Neri flocked to his side, the White Government was overthrown, and the city was set in unspeakable confusion. A reign of terror began, and there was in those days more rioting and bloodshed, fire and murder, than had ever been known before, even in Florence.

Charles established one of his adherents—a certain Conte Gabrielli d'Agubbio—as Podesta, or Magistrate; and together they proceeded to pass sentences upon the fallen Whites, who made absolutely no attempt at self-defence. Dante was marked out for the Pontiff's special vengeance. He was, of course, too dangerous an enemy of the Papal cause to escape ruin. The first sentence passed upon him is dated January 27, 1302. In it Dante and four of his countrymen—Gherardino Diedati, Palmiero Altovite, Lippo Becchi, and Orlanduccio Orlandi—are accused of extortion, fraud and unlawful gains, of resisting Boniface, and of destroying the peace of Florence. As they had not appeared before Charles when summoned to do so, they were held to have confessed their guilt, were perpetually excluded from holding office in the Government, and were banished from the city for two years. They were ordered to pay a fine of 5,000 florins, and to restore the money they were



supposed to have extorted. If payment were not made within three days from the date of the proclamation, their goods and lands would be confiscated.

At first sight it seems difficult to find out what became of Dante between the months of November and February that winter. It was unlike him not to have answered the summons. A false accusation would have stung him to rage, and his first impulse would have been to throw himself into the heart of the struggle, and to use every means, even the most violent, to wipe out the stain that had been cast upon his name. Yet, apparently, he remained absent from Florence.

By carefully comparing the early biographies, it has been possible to build up a theory concerning Dante's movements at that time; a theory which shall be at once true to the poet's character and to the very scanty facts that are known.

Both Dino Compagni, a contemporary chronicler, and Lionardo Bruni, a fifteenth-century writer, state that Dante did not return to Florence with the other Ambassadors. It would seem probable that Boniface, knowing Dante to be the most dangerous of his enemies, detained him at Rome with fair words, deceiving him by apparent compliance with his wishes, at the time when Charles was making havoc in Florence. As news travelled so slowly in those days, it was possible for the Pope to hold his victim in ignorance for a long while. But the

day came when concealment was no longer possible, and Dante heard the truth at last. He left Rome immediately, riding post-haste for home. God knows what a journey that must have been for him, what bitterness of anger filled his heart as he rode along the desolate way, what remorse at having left the State so helpless! He was but a day's journey from Florence when he heard of the execution of the first infamous sentence, which made him homeless and as poor as the beggar by the roadside. The news reached him at Siena, according to Lionardo Bruni.

There is no doubt whatever that Dante never could have committed the crimes of which Charles declared him guilty: his sturdy resistance of Boniface had been his only offence. It was essential, however, that he should be utterly undone. To state that he had defended his country's liberty would hardly appear a convincing reason for exile to the average Florentine; so the Valois Government invented a whole catalogue of sins, and accused Dante of them.

Now that it has become a fashion to deny everything that is beautiful and pure; now that it has become the ambition of mean minds to prove that the great men of old days were mean and sordid too, it is the pleasant pastime of some students to smirch the name of Dante. None of his early biographers credited the calumnies. If those who lived in his times believed him innocent, what right have we to

doubt him? What proof can be alleged that he should stoop to anything so unworthy, so foreign to his nature? Dante was never guilty of a meanness. He stands out as one of the noblest figures in history, and the spirit that quickened him was manifestly the breath of God.

#### IV. THE FIRST PERIOD OF EXILE.

For a long time Dante did not give up hope of returning to Florence, and the early years of his banishment were spent in unavailing attempts to unite his fellow-exiles and restore the Whites to power. He was present at their meetings, first at Siena, then at Gorgonza and Arezzo, becoming their leader as before. The immediate result was to draw down upon himself more hatred from the Blacks. On March 10, 1302, a fresh sentence was issued, exiling him and many of his comrades *for ever*, and condemning them to be burned alive if at any time they should be found in the territory of the Republic.

The fallen Bianchi were impossible to handle. They could not agree among themselves: petty jealousies led to quarrels; quarrels widened into open breaches and ended in treachery. In 1303 Carlino dei Pazzi dealt a heavy blow to the cause by faithlessly surrendering the Castle of Piantravigna in Valdarno to the Neri. In the same year the army of the Whites, under the leadership of Scarpetta degli Ordellaffi of Forlì, was utterly defeated in the Mugello.



*Alinari, photo.*

PORTRAIT BY ANONYMOUS PAINTER, FOURTEENTH  
CENTURY.

Riccardiana Library, Florence.





Dante began to see that, if he were ever to return to Florence, it could not be by the aid of such comrades as these; and, sickened by their disloyalty, incompetence, and petty disputes, he forsook them altogether. Then he commenced the lonely wanderings that were destined to end only in death.

"Thou shalt leave everything most beloved; and this is the first arrow that the bow of exile shooteth." These are Dante's own words taken from the *Paradiso*. He had indeed lost all that he held dearest in the world: his home, and his good name. He, the most intellectual of his age, was for ever exiled from the centre of art and learning, from the modern Athens. He was never again to see the tomb of Beatrice, or the place where she had dwelt in her living beauty. The very loveliness of the forbidden city haunted him. He carried always in his heart a vision of the roofs and domes of Florence nestling among the rounded hills; of the green Arno running down the valley. When he writes of the towers of the city, he calls them by their names. To him they are personalities. Often are the similes in the *Commedia* drawn from recollection of Tuscan things. Many are the tender references to Florence which recur in his works. "Rome's most beautiful and most famous daughter" he calls her in the *Convito*, lamenting that "she has cast him forth from her sweet bosom," where he desires with all his heart "to rest his weary soul." Sometimes his love and longing



for Florence seem to wail through his poetry, the very reticence of the words revealing his pain the more. "Oh! the fair sheepfold," he writes in the *Commedia*—"il bel ovile"; and again, as the memory of the chill, incense-clouded gloom of the city's ancient Baptistry comes strong upon him, "Il mio bel San Giovanni," he cries—"My beautiful St John's!"

But, for all his hidden tenderness, the Dante that the world knew was a strange and terrible man. He was vastly changed indeed from the beautiful youth of Giotto's portrait; he had grown bowed and lined and stern. He was very silent; when he did speak he used wise words, but sharp and sarcastic. His proud soul revolted at the thought that he must now live on charity. He proved, to quote his own magnificent words, "how salt is the savour of another's bread, how hard the going up and down another's stairs."\*

He journeyed first to Verona, where he was the guest of Bartolommeo della Scala. He was at Bologna, at Urbino, at Forlì. "Through nearly all the places where our language is spoken," he wrote in chapter iii. of the *Convito*, "have I wandered, a pilgrim, almost a beggar, showing against my will the wound of fortune. . . . Truly I have been as a ship without sails and without a rudder, borne to divers ports and strands . . . by the dry wind that blows from woeful poverty; and I have appeared vile unto the eyes of many."

\* *Paradiso*, canto xvii.

Towards the end of the year 1303 Boniface died. In his desire for absolute supremacy he had quarrelled with France and excommunicated Philippe le Bel. A faithful servant of the French King, William of Nogaret, went secretly to Italy and conspired with the Pope's most deadly enemy, Sciarra Colonna. Together they sought out Boniface, who was then residing at Agnani. They occupied the little town with their followers, and surprised the Pontiff in his palace. The old man, deserted by all but a few near relatives, faced his foes with a truly Roman dignity. Colonna and Nogaret struck him and heaped all kinds of insults upon him, yet for some unknown reason did not kill him. They and their horsemen rode away, leaving him alive and unhurt. But Boniface had always been a passionate man. Now that he was well advanced in years, his weakened frame could not stand the violent outbreaks of his temper, and he died of rage.

Dante had too broad a mind ever to lose his reverence for the Holy See because it happened to be filled by an unworthy Pope. He could not condone a sacrilegious act even though it rid him of his arch-enemy. The insult, in his opinion, had been offered, not to Boniface, but to the Church of God. It would seem that he specially wished to make this clear, for though in one passage of the *Commedia* he condemns Boniface to eternal perdition, in another passage he speaks as follows of Nogaret's assault: "I see the Fleur-de-lys enter Alagna, and Christ made

captive in his Vicar. I see him mocked once more. I see the vinegar and gall renewed. I see him killed between the living thieves."\*

On November 1, 1304, a holy Dominican was elected Pope under the title of Benedict XI. Beholding Tuscany distracted by the ravages of his predecessor, he desired to pacify it. Cardinal Niccolo da Prato, who was also a Dominican, went to Florence as his emissary. He was a very different kind of peacemaker from the servants of Boniface. The Florentines realised this, and received him with honour. He actually accomplished the difficult feat of reconciling some of the conflicting parties in the city. But it would seem as if Florence were never destined to enjoy quiet: the fates were against it. In the spring of 1305 the old May Day gaieties were revived to celebrate the restoration of peace, and a dense crowd assembled to watch some sports that were taking place on the river. One of the bridges, overweighted with people, broke down, and hundreds of men and women were drowned. This was the first disaster that marred the rejoicing. Then, early in June, when the Cardinal had just left, the Neri treacherously started a terrible fire, and the rioting and street fighting began again. Following close upon this came the news that the Pope was dead, poisoned.

The still-exiled Bianchi, who had been looking forward to a peaceful return to

\* *Purgatorio*, canto xx.

Florence, felt that their hopes had died with Benedict. They made one last gallant effort to regain their own by force. A White named Baschiera della Tosa organised an army, which was joined by the Ghibellines of Tuscany, and by allies from Bologna and Arezzo. They made an attack upon Florence from Sastra. Baschiera, with a handful of men, even penetrated into the town and held the open space round San Marco, his soldiers bearing white banners and olive garlands, and shouting: "Peace! peace!" But, unfortunately, through want of organisation and through the lukewarmness of the allies, this splendid attempt came to nothing.

Dante had watched the varying chances of the year with hungry anxiety, but he had taken no part in the Whites' assault. At this time he had an idea that "his innocence known to all," as he himself wrote, might, if he abstained from any action against the Government, obtain for him a return to Florence now that Boniface was no more. But the slow years that went by brought no recall.

Dante gradually detached himself from his surroundings, and lived in a dream world of his own creation. His thoughts were absorbed in the great work he had conceived while still in Florence, the *Commedia*, which was to be an imperishable memorial to Beatrice. Boccaccio states that the poet had written seven cantos of the *Inferno* before he set out on the disastrous embassy to Rome in 1301, and that Madonna



Gemma saved the papers from confiscation when the evil days came. The manuscript, according to the biographer, was forwarded to Dante about the year 1307, while he was under the roof of the Malaspina, in the Lunigiana. Boccaccio tells how, when the poet received the cantos, he said:

"I had believed that these, together with many of my other writings and effects, were lost when my house was plundered, and therefore I had given up all thoughts of them. But since it has pleased God that they should not be lost, and He has thus restored them to me, I shall endeavour, as far as I am able, to proceed with them, according to my first design."\*

From that time forth he carried the manuscript on all his wanderings, and worked at it until his death. All the ideas that he could not share with the ignorant, trivial men and women that he met he poured out in the magnificent lines of the *Commedia*.

These were the bitterest years of Dante's life, and the *Inferno*, the product of these years, is the most passionate poem in all literature. His scalding hatred of his enemies, his condemnation of all that is mean and cowardly, and that other surprising side of his nature, his tenderness and compassion for suffering, are revealed to us in this first *cantica* of the *Divine Comedy*, as though we saw the writer's soul reflected in some spiritual mirror.

\* Wicksteed's translation.

It is not known with certainty what the great exile's movements were between 1306 and 1310. Some historians, following Villani and Boccaccio, state that he left Italy and visited the Universities of Oxford and Paris. Boccaccio says that Dante held the French college spell-bound by his subtle disputations on theology and philosophy. A later writer, Giovanni da Serravalle, declares that the poet was about to become a Doctor of Theology at the latter University, when events of utmost importance called him back to Italy.

Albert of Hapsburg had reigned as Roman Emperor since 1298. He had had no care for the welfare of his people, and, in Dante's words, had "suffered the garden of the Empire to grow desolate." In 1308 he was assassinated by his own nephew, and the next year Henry of Luxemburg was elected his successor and crowned at Aix, with the title of Henry VII. The new Sovereign's heart was filled with ideas of all the reforms he would accomplish. He would be the peacemaker, the healer of Italy's wounds; he would succeed where holy Benedict had failed. "He believed," says Mr. Edmund Gardner, "in the possibility of the union of Church and Empire in a peaceful Italy." He hoped for the Pope's co-operation. Not by bloodshed was this great result to be obtained, but by a mere show of strength. He was in all things to be the Apostle of Peace. With these ends in view he crossed the Alps, and received the iron crown at Milan in January, 1311.



When the news of the Emperor's ambitions reached Dante in Paris, he rejoiced. He hastened back to his native country, and flung himself, as usual, into the very centre of activity. Here was at last the leader he had hoped for so long, here was the saviour of the unhappy land, he told the people. He warned them, with all the fervour of an ancient prophet, that in these projects the finger of God was working through a creature. "Lo! now is the acceptable time, wherein arise the signs of consolation and peace," he wrote in an epistle addressed, "To the Princes and Peoples of Italy": "for a new day beginneth to glow, showing forth the dawn which even now maketh less thick the darkness of our long calamity . . . and we . . . shall see the looked-for joy, we who have kept vigil through the long night in the desert."\* Dante goes on to proclaim that the Emperor should have absolute supremacy, and that all the Italians should yield to him. The poet himself had already knelt before Henry and offered him his service. "I saw thee, as beseems Imperial Majesty most benignant, and heard thee most clement, what time my hands handled thy feet, and my lips paid their debt. Then did my spirit exult in thee,"† he writes to the Emperor in Epistle VII.

But Italy was Guelf at heart, and would not stoop so easily to a Teuton yoke. Henry

\* Wicksteed's translation.

† *Ibid.*

patched up a temporary peace in some cities, inducing them to take back their exiles. Other towns held aloof, and would commit themselves to nothing. A few, like Florence and Brescia, flung defiance in the face of the alien, and declared that nothing would compel them to yield. A Guelf league was formed in opposition to the Emperor, headed by Florence, under the leadership of Robert, King of Naples. Thus once again a would-be peace-maker was but the cause of fresh strife. Henry was obliged to give up his ideas of a bloodless conquest and take to fighting. The struggle lasted two years. Dante, distracted by the perversity of his countrymen, launched epistle after epistle upbraiding the "most wicked Florentines," who dared to oppose God's champion. He even went so far as to rebuke the Emperor himself for his delay in seizing Florence. From September 19 till October 31, 1312, the Ghibelline soldiers besieged the valiant little Tuscan town. But Dante's "Alto Arrigo"—his "Mighty Harry"—was sick of a fever; his spirits were flagging already, and he had not the courage to attack Florence. The Imperial army retreated; and when Henry VII. died on the march in August, 1313, he had not conquered the city.

Dante's despair may well be imagined. The only result of his campaign had been to draw down upon himself a new sentence from the Commune, excluding him for ever from amnesty.

## V. THE LAST PERIOD OF EXILE, AND DANTE'S DEATH.

Dante recommenced his wanderings, seeking food and shelter where he could find them, protected now and again by some great lords, until they tired of the strange pilgrim with his stern humours, and cast him adrift once more.

"Arriving only to depart  
From court to court, from land to land,  
Like flame within the naked hand,  
His body bore his burning heart."\*

He was only to make one more appearance in the world of politics, but his last attempt at reform was perhaps the finest effort of his life. This time it was to the Church that he addressed himself.

Clement V., the Pope who succeeded Boniface VIII., was that weakling who cringed to Philippe le Bel and transferred the seat of the Papacy from Rome to Avignon. Dante, whose love and veneration for the Church were as deep as his own great heart, had looked on the Pope's servitude with dismay. Clement died in April, 1314, and it was not until two years later that the Cardinals met at Carpentras for the election of a new Pope. Of these Cardinals six were Italian and eighteen were foreigners. Dante saw that a crisis had arrived, and he was determined to leave nothing undone that might help to save the

\* Rossetti.



*Rischgitz, photo.]*

BRONZE BUST OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

National Museum, Naples.





Church's dignity. If words of his could weigh in the balance, he would not spare them. He therefore composed the most magnificent of all his epistles, which he addressed to his compatriots among the Cardinals. He began the letter with the lamentation of Jeremias : "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people ! How is she become as a widow, she who was mistress of nations !" He went on to urge the Council to liberate the Church by electing an Italian Pope, to restore the Papacy to Rome, to lead Christ's Bride back from Babylon to Israel. He excuses his presumption in interfering with the high affairs of the Papacy in the following words, which are most characteristic of him : "I am one of the least of the sheep in the fold of Jesus Christ, and without authority among the pastors, *for there is no wealth with me.* Not by wealth, therefore, but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and He hath raised me up, zealous for His house."

Wealth and influence alone, however, were to tell in this election. However honestly the Italians in the Council may have striven to do right—and tradition says that, fired by Dante's eloquence, they did strive indeed—they were crushed by the foreign Cardinals, who were most of them the creatures of Philippe le Bel. The new Pope, John XXII., a Caorsine, remained at Avignon, a tool in the hand of France.

When Dante heard the news he betrayed



neither wrath nor sorrow. The bitterness seemed to have gone out of him now; unearthly calm had fallen upon him. It was not that his pride was broken: he was as proud on his death-bed as he ever was in youth. It was only that he was growing each year more detached. Dante's mind had become "like silver tried by the fire, purged from the earth, refined seven times." He had passed through the furnace of humiliation, and his soul was purified of its ferocity and vengeful anger; nought remained but the noble qualities.

The softening of Dante's nature is plainly visible in the works which he produced at this time. The *Inferno*, with its fiery pain and ice-cold of despair, is finished and laid by. The *Purgatorio* is a very different poem. Its atmosphere is a tender spiritual twilight, full of suffering, it is true, but how unlike the suffering of hell! The souls upon the penitential mount are comforted by angels. The scene melts almost imperceptibly into the vision of Paradise, where Dante's intellect, etherealised beyond belief, soars from heaven to heaven, until it rests in the glorious heart of the "Sempiternal Rose."

In his fifty-second year the poet stayed his weary feet at the palace of Guido da Polenta, Lord of Ravenna. What the Great Master said has proved true from immemorial days: "Ye know that a prophet hath no honour in his own country." Dante, whom his fellow-citizens had exiled, whom they had threatened

to burn alive, was received among the Ravennese with every mark of reverence. Guido became his friend; he gave hospitality to Dante's two sons, Piero and Jacopo, and to his daughter Beatrice, who had journeyed from Tuscany to tend their father. Dante always had the gift of becoming the centre of every gathering. He had scarcely been a year at Ravenna before a little school of intellectuals collected round him. His fame spread. Learned men and dignitaries of the Church became his pupils in the art of versifying. He corresponded with one of the most famous scholars of Italy, Giovanni del Virgilio, who esteemed it an honour to receive his letters. The University of Bologna offered him the laurel wreath, but the poet refused it. All his life he had dreamed and hoped that his own Florence might even at the last relent, forced into admiration of his genius, and yield him the tribute he so well deserved. If he were not to receive the laurels in his beloved Florentine Baptistry, then would he die uncrowned.

About this time a message did come to him from the city of his desire, but it was no message of honour, no offering of a crown. Florence was making a concession to her exiles. If they would pay a fine, and would present themselves as sinners at the Baptistry, asking forgiveness publicly from the people, then they might return in peace to their homes. Such was the proposal made to Dante.

It is in the answer to this that Dante's

new detachment is most remarkable. We can imagine how he would have met such a proposition in his old fiery days: now he puts the matter on one side with quiet dignity.

"Is this the glorious recall," he writes to a friend in Florence, "whereby, after nearly fifteen years of exile, Dante Alighieri is invited back to his country? Is this the reward of mine innocence, known to all, of the sweat of my labours, of my long studies? Far be from the man who loveth philosophy the abasement of the abject heart in appearing (as did some wretched ones who shall be nameless) almost as a malefactor in chains. Far be from the Apostle of Justice the infamy of paying tribute to those who have injured him. . . . This is not the way of return. If there be a way which does not wound either the fame or the honour of Dante, willingly will I accept it, and my footsteps shall not be slow upon the journey. But should this be the only entrance into Florence, then shall I never see Florence again. What? Can I not see the beauty of the sun and of the stars elsewhere? Can I not be blessed in the thought of the great truths under any part of heaven, without covering myself with shame before the eyes of the Florentine people?"

The fatality which pursued Dante all his days would not let him long enjoy this peaceful refuge. Clouds of war began to gather about his patron's land. The Ravennese had slain some Venetian sailors—so is it set down in a

Venetian chronicle—and the great Republic of the Adriatic allied herself with Forlì and Rimini and prepared for revenge. Guido's small forces could never hope to resist so formidable a foe, and in his hour of need he turned to Dante, whose eloquence perhaps might avert the impending disaster. Thus once more the burden of State affairs was thrust upon the poet. With a small band of friends, he set off by sea to negotiate with Venice. He was anxious to repay Guido for his hospitality, and he was confident that he would be able to do so by bringing matters to a successful issue. But this embassy, upon which he started with such high hopes, was only destined to be the culminating disappointment of his life. According to Villani, the Doge declined to hear the envoys, the Venetians heaped insults upon them, and refused to allow them a passage home by sea. Dante, ill with fever and weighed down by grief, was forced to come back along the marshy malaria-haunted coast. When he reached Ravenna the hand of death was on him. Destruction had not yet burst upon the little city, but it was inevitable now he had been powerless to save his friend. He could not lift his head again; he was utterly broken-hearted.

The world knows well, from the famous death-mask, how stern and sad were Dante's features in the end. It is easy to imagine how he looked as he lay in his mortal weakness—his face wan and drawn, and yet lit up by



the vitality of his soul. Rossetti's simile must have been more than ever true of him then : "Like flame within the naked hand," his wasted body "bore his burning heart."

The *Paradiso* was only just finished when he died ; he may even have worked at it during his last illness. He had hardly completed the description of the tenth heaven, where dwells the majesty of God, before his spirit was caught up for ever into the glory. It would seem as though, having once looked upon the eternal mysteries, he could never again be bound to earth.

It was on September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, in the year 1321, that Dante breathed his last.

Even the fear of approaching invasion could not hinder Guido da Polenta from paying every possible honour to the dead poet. His cold brows were crowned with the laurels he had never worn in life. His body was borne upon an open bier by the most renowned citizens of Ravenna to the convent of the Friars Minor in the town. "And having followed him to this place in the midst of public lamentation," writes Boccaccio, "Guido had the body laid in a sarcophagus of stone, wherein it reposes to this day."



*Rischgitz, photo.]*

GIOTTO'S PORTRAIT OF DANTE.

From a drawing by Seymour Kirkup before the restoration of the fresco.





## DANTE'S WORKS

### THE "VITA NUOVA."

WHEN Dante was born the Italian language was a despised thing. Serious works were written in Latin, and the *lingua volgare* was used only in the composition of dainty lyrics in praise of women. This vulgar tongue was the offspring of the ancient Sicilian speech, in which the troubadours had sung. It was very sweet, very liquid, but never strong or picturesque.

The early Italian poems, like the early Italian paintings, are pretty in idea, but angular in form. And, just as the painter loved to embroider the Madonna's dress with wondrous tracery of gold and colours, so the poet was wont to overload his verse with conceits and allegory. Giotto and Dante eventually swept aside all these traditions, but in the beginning they were both hampered by precedent. Giotto's first pictures might be classed with those of his predecessors; it is the same school, only better workmanship. It is not so with his maturer work, which stands alone in truth and simplicity. Thus it

was with Dante. In the *Vità Nuova* he is still under the influence of the past ; he is forced to use the same elaborate style, because he has not yet created a new school. But during his life he raised the language to heights before undreamed of.

We are made aware of the old-fashioned method in the very first page of the *Vità Nuova*. The poet hampers the love story with metaphor. He is fascinated by the mystic number nine, which he considers has an important influence on his life. He mentions the number whenever he can, even when the allusion is obviously strained and false.

"Nine times already since my birth," runs the beginning of the *Vità Nuova*, "had the heaven of light returned to the selfsame point almost as concerns its own revolution, when first the glorious lady of my mind was made manifest to mine eyes. . . . She had already been in this life for so long as that, within her time, the starry heaven had moved towards the eastern quarter one of the twelve parts of a degree ; so that she appeared to me at the beginning of her ninth year almost, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year. . . . At that moment I say most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith ; and in trembling it said these words : '*Ecce Deus fortior mei, qui veniens dominabitur mihi.*' At that moment

the inanimate spirit, which dwelleth in the lofty chamber whither all the senses carry their perceptions, was filled with wonder, and, speaking more especially unto the spirits of the eyes, said these words: '*Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra.*' At that moment the natural spirit, which dwelleth there where our nourishment is administered, began to weep, and in weeping said these words: '*Heu miser! Quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps.*'"\*

The number nine appears again several times in the description of the next recorded event. "It was," he says, "after the lapse of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above-written appearance of this most gracious being," that she first granted him her greeting. "The hour of her most sweet salutation," he continues, "was exactly the ninth of that day." That night he sees her in a vision, and he says, on awaking: "I knew that the hour wherein this vision had been made manifest to me was the fourth hour (which is to say, the first of the nine last hours) of the night."

Dante adopted the following method in writing the *Vità Nuova*: He collected the poems he had written in praise of Beatrice, and arranged them in chronological order. He took each one as it came, and wrote down in prose the account of the circumstances which had caused him to write it. Then he transcribed the verses, appending a little com-

\* Rossetti's translation.

mentary upon them. Thus does he recount the vision which led him to compose his first sonnet: ". . . Betaking me to the loneliness of mine own room, I fell to thinking of this most courteous lady, thinking of whom I was overtaken by a pleasant slumber, wherein a marvellous vision was presented to me, for there appeared to be in my room a mist of the colour of fire, within the which I discerned the figure of a lord of terrible aspect . . . but who seemed therewithal to rejoice inwardly that it was a marvel to see. Speaking, he said many things, among the which I could understand but few; and of these, this: '*Ego dominus tuus.*' In his arms it seemed to me that a person was sleeping, covered only with a blood-coloured cloth; upon whom looking very attentively I knew that it was the lady of the salutation . . . And he . . . held also in his hand a thing that was burning in flames, and he said to me: '*Vide cor tuum.*' But when he had remained with me a little while, I thought that he set himself to awaken her that slept; after the which he made her to eat that thing which flamed in his hand; and she ate as one fearing. Then, having waited again a space, all his joy was turned into most bitter weeping; and as he wept he gathered the lady into his arms, and it seemed to me that he went with her up towards heaven; whereby such a great anguish came upon me that my light slumber could not endure through it, but was suddenly broken. . . . Then, musing on what I had



seen, I proposed to relate the same to many poets who were famous in that day, and, for that I had myself in some sort the art of discoursing with rhyme, I resolved on making a sonnet, in the which, having saluted all such as are subject unto love, and entreated them to expound my vision, I should write unto them those things which I had seen in my sleep. And the sonnet I made was this :

“ ‘ To every heart which the sweet pain doth move,  
And unto which these words may now be brought  
For true interpretation and kind thought,  
Be greeting in our Lord's name, which is Love.  
Of those long hours wherein the stars above  
Wake and keep watch, the third was almost naught  
When Love was shown me with such terrors fraught  
As may not carelessly be spoken of.  
He seemed like one who is full of joy and had  
My heart within his hand, and on his arm  
My lady, with a mantle round her, slept ;  
Whom (having wakened her) anon he made  
To eat that heart ; she ate as fearing harm.  
Then he went out, and as he went he wept. ’ ”

“ This sonnet is divided into two parts. In the first place I give greeting, and ask an answer ; in the second I signify what thing has to be answered to. The second part commences here : ‘ Of those long hours. ’ ”\*

Dante goes on to tell how, from continual brooding on his love, his countenance became so changed that his friends sought to know the-

\* This and the following quotations are taken from Rossetti's translation.



reason of his pale looks. But he, prompted by the fear of self-betrayal common to all lovers, evaded their question. With extreme *naïveté* he relates how he used another lady's name to conceal his real feelings, and how this slight disingenuousness became a source of trouble for him later. People were only too ready to talk. Evil rumours reached Beatrice's ears, and, to his despair, she refused him her salutation. Whereupon, "in the ninth hour of the day," the spirit of Love once more appeared to him in a vision, this time in "very white raiment," as a mark of his innocence, and said, "My son, it is time for us to lay aside our counterfeiting." So, by Love's counsel, Dante sent a ballad to his lady, professing his undying love for her, and her alone.

Dante incorporated in the *Vita Nuova* a tender little sonnet upon the death of one of Beatrice's companions. "It pleased the Master of the Angels to call into His glory a damsel, young and of a gentle presence, who had been very lovely in the city I speak of," he writes, "and I saw her body lying without its soul among many ladies, who held a pitiful weeping. Whereupon, remembering that I had seen her in the company of the excellent Beatrice, I could not hinder myself from a few tears, and weeping, I conceived to say somewhat of her death:

"Weep, lovers, sith Love's very self doth weep,  
And sith the cause of weeping is so great;  
When now so many dames, of such estate  
In worth, show with their eyes a grief so deep.

For Death the churl has laid his leaden sleep  
 Upon a damsel who was fair of late,  
 Defacing all our earth should celebrate,  
 Yea, all, save virtue, which the soul doth keep.  
 Now hearken how much Love did honour her.  
 I myself saw him in his proper form \*  
 Bending above the motionless sweet dead,  
 And often gazing into heaven; for there  
 The soul now sits which, when her life was warm,  
 Dwelt with the joyful beauty that is fled.'"

The description of Beatrice's marriage feast has already been given in full. After the great anguish of that time, Dante's flame of love only burned the purer and brighter, and in her honour he composed poem after poem of delicate praise.

"Love saith concerning her: 'How chanceth it  
 That flesh, which is of dust, should be thus pure?'  
 Then, gazing always, he makes oath, 'For sure,  
 This is a creature of God till now unknown.  
 She hath that paleness of a pearl that's fit  
 In a fair woman, so much and not more;  
 She is as high as Nature's skill can soar,  
 Beauty is tried by her comparison.  
 Whatever her sweet eyes are turned upon,  
 Spirits of Love do issue thence in flame  
 Which through their eyes who then may look on  
 them,  
 Pierce to the heart's deep chamber every one;  
 And in her smile Love's image you may see;  
 Whence none may gaze upon her steadfastly.'"

And in a sonnet of still greater beauty he says:

"My lady carries love within her eyes;  
 All that she looks on is made pleasanter;

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\* That is to say, "I myself saw Beatrice."

Upon her path men turn to gaze at her ;  
He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise,  
And droops his troubled visage, full of sighs,  
And of his evil heart is then aware :  
Hate loves, and pride becomes a worshipper.  
O women, help to praise her in somehow.  
Humbleness, and the hope that hopeth well,  
By speech of hers, into the mind are brought,  
And who beholds is blessed oftenwhiles,  
The look she hath when she a little smiles  
Cannot be said, nor holden in the thought ;  
'Tis such a new and gracious miracle."

A little later Dante records how he fell sick of a grievous infirmity, and how, as he lay between life and death, this thought came to him : " Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice must die." Thereafter, falling into delirium, he saw the dead Beatrice in a vision. " I beheld my lady in death, whose head certain ladies seemed to be covering with a white veil, and who was so humble of her aspect that it was as though she had said : ' I have attained to look on the beginning of peace. . . . ' And therewithal . . . I cried out upon Death, saying : ' Now come unto me and be not bitter against me any longer. Surely there where thou hast been, thou hast learned gentleness. ' "

This shadow of loss which darkened Dante's heart was soon to be followed by the cold reality. He was in the middle of a ballad in praise of Beatrice when he heard of her death. He left the poem for ever unfinished, appending the words of Jeremias : "*Quomodo*

*sedet sola civitas plena populo ! Facta est quasi  
vidua domina gentium !*"

"I was still occupied with this poem . . ." he adds, "when the Lord God of Justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself, that she might be glorious under the banner of that blessed Queen Mary whose name had always a deep reverence in the words of holy Beatrice."

His lamentations for his lady are the most delicate flowers of mourning.

"Beatrice is gone up into high heaven,  
The kingdom where the angels are at peace,  
And lives with them ; and to her friends is dead.  
Not by the frost of winter was she driven  
Away, like others ; nor by summer-heats ;  
But through a perfect gentleness, instead.  
For, from the lamp of her meek lowlihead  
Such an exceeding glory went up hence  
That it woke wonder in the Eternal Sire,  
Until a sweet desire  
Entered Him for that lovely excellence,  
So that He bade her to Himself aspire ;  
Counting this weary and most evil place  
Unworthy of a thing so full of grace."

In another place he says :

"Whatever while the thought comes over me,  
That I may not again  
Behold that lady whom I mourn for now,  
About my heart my mind brings constantly  
So much of extreme pain  
That I say, ' Soul of mine, why stayest thou ?  
Truly the anguish, soul, that we must bow  
Beneath, until we win out of this life,  
Gives me full oft a fear that trembleth :  
So that I call on death



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And droops his troubled visage, full of sighs,  
And of his evil heart is then aware :  
Hate loves, and pride becomes a worshipper.  
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been written of any woman. After the which may it seem good unto Him who is the Master of grace that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its lady; to wit of that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus. Laus Deo.*"

So ends the *Vità Nuova*.

## THE DIVINE COMEDY

WHEN Dante wrote the *Vità Nuova*, he indeed exalted the vulgar tongue by giving it a charm hitherto unknown ; but he had not yet lifted it out of its recognised sphere—that of love poetry.

When he desired to narrate the vision mentioned in the conclusion of the *New Life*, the force of custom was so strong upon him that he began the work in Latin. There are some Latin verses still extant, which are supposed by many to be the commencement of the *Inferno*. But the love of his own Tuscan drew him irresistibly, and he turned again to the *volgare*. The *Divine Comedy* was not only the first epic ever written in Italian : it was the greatest. Not one of the poets who came after Dante, speaking the language he so greatly enriched, can approach the strength and beauty of his style.

The *Comedy* is divided into three *cantiche*, very carefully balanced as to length. There are thirty-four cantos of the *Inferno*, and thirty-three of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.



DANTE AND HIS THREE WORLDS.



## THE INFERNO.

The first two cantos of the *Inferno* have nothing to do with hell, but are an allegorical prologue to the *Divine Comedy*. Dante lost his way in the forest of Sin, and when, after long terror-stricken wandering, he came forth from the thorny darkness he found himself at the foot of a sunlit mountain—the mountain of Salvation shining in the glory of God's grace. As he began the ascent three fierce beasts attacked him—a leopard, a lion, and a wolf. Each animal has a political as well as a religious significance. The leopard typifies luxury and represents Florence; the lion is symbolical of ambition and the Royal House of France; and the wolf is avarice and the Papal See. The most terrible of them is the wolf, which means that Dante's worst enemy is the Pope. The beasts barred his road, and such fear seized him that he was wellnigh driven back into the forest. At this moment supernatural aid came to him. "When I was returning to the low places," so run the lines, the beauty of which no translation can ever convey, "one was offered to mine eyes whose voice seemed dim from long silence. When I beheld him in the great waste places, 'Have mercy upon me,' I cried to him, 'whoever thou mayest be, or man or shadow.'" Faintly came the reply, "Not man! man I was once." It was the soul of Virgil, the poet whom Dante revered above all others, come from Limbo to



succour his disciple. "Oh, honour and light of other poets . . ." said Dante, when the spirit had revealed his identity. "Thou art my master and my author; thou art he from whom alone I drew that fair style which hath done me honour! Behold the beast wherefore I turned me. Help me against her, thou famous wise one, for she maketh all my veins and pulses tremble."

Virgil explained that to escape from the danger Dante must take a strange journey. He must pass through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven in order to resume the right road. Dante replied: "Poet, I conjure thee, by that God whom thou didst not know, that I may fly from this evil. . . . Lead me where thou hast said."

In the evening twilight they entered "a high wild pathway," and as they went Virgil related how Beatrice, pitying her lover's plight, had come down from her heavenly sphere to seek the poet, bidding him rescue Dante.

The third canto opens as they stood before the gates of Hell. Dante read the dread inscription over the entrance: "Through me ye go into the city of woe, through me ye go into eternal pain, through me ye go among the lost people." "We are come to the place where I told thee that thou shouldst see the woeful people who have lost the blessing of intellect," said Virgil. A truly Dantesque

touch this. To him the worst of all evils was the dimming of the mind. "When he had placed his hand in mine with a gay brow, whereat I took comfort," writes Dante, "he put me in unto the secret things."

Dante has gained immeasurably since he wrote the *New Life*. This is literature of another kind, strong and splendid, reticent and graphic. Only those who read the *Inferno* in Italian can appreciate the grandeur of the verse, its untranslatable melody. But although the beauty of form must be lost in another language, the beauty of thought remains. The lines describing the first glimpse of Hell are almost Biblical in their majesty. "Here sighs, tears and great lamentations resounded through the starless air, so that in the beginning I wept. Divers tongues, horrible tales, words of woe, accents of wrath, voices shrill and hoarse, and withal the beating of hands, made a tumult which whirleth for ever in that air, eternally coloured as is the sand that the storm wind bloweth. And I, whose head was circled with horror, said: 'Master, what is that I hear? and what people are those who seem so crushed in pain?' And he to me: 'The sad souls of those who lived without infamy, but without praise, hold this miserable custom. . . . These have no hope of death, and their blind life is so debased that they are envious of every other fate. The world admitteth no memory of them. Mercy and Justice scorn them. Let us not speak of them. Look thou and pass.'"

It is wonderful how Dante reveals his own nature during the course of the narrative, without making a parade of his opinions. In a few lines he conveys to us his theory that the most despicable thing in the world is inaction. A great sinner is less worthy of scorn than the weakling who has not the courage to do either evil or good. Most to be blamed are those who shirk life's responsibilities, and such are the wrong-doers who wander in Ante-hell. There Dante beheld the spirit of Pope Celestine V., whom the Church deemed a saint, but who appeared damnable in the stern poet's eyes, because by resigning the Papacy he avoided the duties God had laid upon him. "I saw the shade of him who from cowardice did make the great refusal. Immediately I understood that this was that sect of the wicked who are displeasing alike to God and to His enemies."

Further on the pilgrims reached the banks of Acheron, where Charon ferries the lost souls across. The despair of the spirits when Charon upbraided them is marvellously described: "Those souls, who were naked and weary, changed colour and gnashed their teeth immediately on hearing the harsh words. They cursed God and their parents, the human race, the place, the time and the seed of their sowing, and their birth. Then they all huddled together, loudly weeping upon the accursed shore which awaiteth every man who feareth not God."

In the beginning of Canto iv. the two companions, having passed the river, looked down into Hell's pit. "In truth, I found myself upon the brink of the valley of the abyss of pain, where gathereth the thunder of infinite lamentation. Dark it was, and deep and misty. . . . 'Now let us go down into the blind world,' began the poet, pale as death. . . ." And I, who had perceived his colour, said: "How shall I go if thou dost fear, who art wont to be comfort to my doubting?" And he to me: "The anguish of the people who are below hath painted on my face that pity which thou takest for fear."

The first infernal circle, below Ante-hell, is Limbo, where the souls of the ancients and of little children dwell in peaceful green fields enclosed from the surrounding torment. "Here there was no weeping, only sighs which made the eternal air to tremble." The inhabitants of this circle (from whence Virgil came) are "people with eyes slow and grave, of great authority in their bearing, who spoke rarely with sweet voices."

Canto v. contains the beautiful story of Paolo and Francesca. "I came to a place," writes Dante, "where there was no light, where there was roaring as of a sea in tempest. . . . The infernal storm, which is never quieted, carrieth the spirits on in its rushing; twisting and buffeting, it tormenteth them. . . .



Here are cries and wailing and lamentation ; here is the Divine Power blasphemed." These are the souls who sinned through love. Dante called up the spirits of Paolo and Francesca. They came clinging together, seeming light upon the wind, and spoke to him of their great love which still endured. Dante's heart burned with pity. "When I had heard these offended souls, I bent my head, holding it bent so long that the poet said : 'What thinkest thou ? . . .' I began : 'O misery ! how many sweet thoughts and how much desire led these two to the sorrowful pass.' Francesca then described how Paolo first avowed his passion. 'We read one day for pleasure of Lancelot, and how much love oppressed him. . . . Many a time our eyes did cease that reading and our faces paled, but one thing only overcame us. When we read how the desired smiling lips were kissed by the lover, he, who never shall be parted from me, all trembling kissed me on the mouth.' While one spirit spoke, the other wept, so that I grew faint for pity, and fell as a dead man falleth."

When Dante recovered consciousness he found himself among the souls of the gluttonous. The sixth canto describes how the spirits lie on the ground, beaten down by a foul cold rain, which makes them "howl like dogs." To add to their suffering, the hell-hound, Cerberus, bays unceasingly in their ears. "We passed among the shadows whom the heavy rain



quelleth, and placed the soles of our feet upon their emptiness, which seemeth human substance." What an inimitably reticent description! In two lines Dante puts before us the delusive shadowiness of the other world :

"Ponevam le piante  
Sopra lor vanità che par persona."

As the two walked in silence, a prostrate soul rose and addressed Dante : "Oh, thou, who through this Hell art drawn, . . . recognise me if thou canst, for thou wast made before I was undone!" It was a Florentine nicknamed Ciaccio, the "Pig," because of his greed. When Dante and he had discoursed of their distracted city, Ciaccio said : "When thou shalt be in the sweet world, I beseech thee to recall me to the mind of others." Throughout the *Commedia* this is the one petition of the dead ; it is the cry of Dante's own heart, whose first desire was for fame.

Canto vii. begins with an account of how those who used their wealth for evil push heavy weights in a circle for ever. The avaricious run in a contrary direction to the spendthrift, and they meet, crashing against each other. Dante wondered at the madness of those who covet riches, "for all the gold that is under the moon . . . could not bring rest to one of these weary souls."

Further, on the wrathful are plunged in the Stygian marsh. "I saw muddy people in that swamp," says Dante, "naked and of indignant

seeming. These struck each other, not with their hands only, but with their heads and breasts and feet. . . . The good master said : ' Son, now behold the souls of those whom anger conquered . . . and under the water there are sighing people who make it bubble on the surface. . . . Deep in the slime they are saying : " We were sullen in the sweet sun-gladdened air, carrying within us the fumes of anger ; now we are sullen in black mud." ' ' "

The eighth canto relates how the two poets were ferried across the river Styx by Phlegyas. The damned perceived how the unaccustomed burden of a living man weighed down the boat in the water. " One full of mud rose up before me," writes Dante, " and said : ' Who art thou that comest before thine hour ? ' And I to him : ' If I come, I do not stay. But who art thou that hast become so vile ? ' He answered : ' Behold, I am one who weepeth.' Then he stretched out both hands towards the boat, whereat the watchful master thrust him down, saying : ' Away with thee among the other dogs ! ' "

This canto was written in one of Dante's bitterest hours, and the very lines breathe hatred. The soul was Filippo Argenti, a Florentine enemy of his. " I said : ' Master, greatly am I desirous to see him ducked in this mire ! . . . ' And he to me : ' Ere thou beholdest the shore, thou shalt be satisfied.' . . . After a little while I saw the muddy people ferment

him, so that I still thank and praise God for it. They all cried, 'At Filippo Argenti!' and the fantastic Florentine spirit turned his own teeth upon himself."

The pilgrims next perceived the red towers of Dis appearing through the gloom. As they landed from the skiff, the fallen angels refused them admittance into the Infernal City. "Who is this," they said scornfully, "who without death goeth through the land of the dead?"

The ninth canto relates how Virgil and the terror-stricken Dante stood aghast before the insolent demons when an angel of God ran swiftly from Paradise to succour them. He rebuked the devils, who instantly allowed free passage.

The tenth canto is one of the finest of the *Commedia*. The poets, on passing the gates of Dis, beheld a vast place filled with open flaming tombs, in which the souls of the Epicurean heretics are imprisoned. Dante's account of his conversation with two of the spirits is a wonderful impressionist picture. A few swift touches, and the scene appears before us—the shadowy place, the glow of the flames in the monuments, the two ghosts rising to accost the wanderer: Cavalcante Cavalcanti hopeless and heart-broken, Farinata degli Uberti undaunted and proud as ever, even in damnation.

The latter called first: "Oh, Tuscan, who goest living through the fiery city . . . may it please thee to pause." Dante shrank in fear, but Virgil said: "Behold Farinata who is arisen. From the girdle upwards thou shalt see him." "I had already fixed my gaze upon him," says Dante. "And he held breast and brow erect, like one who had a mighty scorn of Hell." Disdainfully he asked: "Who were thine ancestors?" When Dante had answered his question, he said: "Fierce enemies were they unto me and unto my race and party, wherefore twice I scattered them." . . . "They returned from all parts," Dante answered him, "but your party learned not well that art." At this moment the shade of Cavalcante Cavalcanti rose beside Farinata in the tomb, and looked about, hoping to see one he loved with Dante, but, beholding only Virgil, he said with tears: "Where is my son, and why is he not with thee?" Dante replied: "He who waiteth yonder leadeth me, whom perhaps your Guido had in scorn." Suddenly rising, the spirit cried: "How sayest thou he *had*? Doth he not live still? doth the sweet light not strike his eyes?" Dante hesitated before replying, whereupon the soul fell back, and reappeared no more.

This Guido, son of Cavalcante Cavalcanti, was Dante's bosom friend. As an extreme Gueff, he would be inimical to Virgil, who sang of the glories of Imperial Rome. This theory, which is held by many commentators, elucidates the above rather obscure passage.

Farinata, quite unaffected by the pathos of the scene, took up the conversation exactly where he left it. "That other great soul changed not his aspect, nor moved his neck, nor bent his ribs. 'And if,' he said, continuing his former speech, 'they have ill learnt that art, it tormenteth me more than this bed!'"

Farinata then discoursed about Florentine politics, prophesying Dante's banishment, after which the poets resumed their journey.

Canto xi. is consumed in philosophical discussions upon the divisions of Hell, and upon the varying degrees of guilt incurred by the sinners.

Canto xii. relates how Dante and Virgil came to Phlegethon, the river of boiling blood, wherein are plunged all those who shed blood on earth. Centaurs gallop along the banks, piercing with arrows those who would emerge from torture.

Canto xiii. describes the wood of the suicides, where the souls themselves have grown into dreadful trees. "Here no leaf was green, but of a dun colour. Here were no straight branches, but knotty and twisted. Here was no fruit, but only poisoned spikes. . . . I heard lamenting all around, and yet saw none that wailed; wherefore, all wondering, I paused. . . . The Master said: 'If thou breakest a little twig from one of these plants, the thoughts thou hast will all be made void.' Then I



stretched forth my hand a little, breaking a small branch from a great tree. Its trunk cried out: 'Why manglest thou me?' When it had grown all dim with blood, it recommenced to wail: 'Why rendest thou me? Hast thou no spirit of pity? We were men, and now we are made trees.' . . . From the broken branch came forth together words and blood, wherefore I let the tip fall, and stood as a man who feareth."

In order to make amends to the offended soul, Dante promised to refresh his fame on earth.

After a while the comrades passed out of the forest into a new circle, described in Canto xiv. They beheld a desert, whereon tongues of fire eternally fall "like snow among windless Alps." Here the souls of the violent against God, against Nature, and against Art, are punished. Some lie upon the burning sand, others sit huddled up, others roam for ever.

Canto xv. contains the beautiful episode of Dante's encounter with his master, Brunetto Latini. ". . . We met a troop of souls . . . and each looked upon us as men are wont to look on one another in the evening under a new moon."

One of the spirits recognised Dante, and took him by a fold of his garment, crying: "Oh! wonderful!" Dante, scanning the poor scorched face, knew the soul. "I answered: 'Art thou here, Ser Brunetto?' 'Oh, son,' he

said, 'let it not displease thee if Brunetto Latini walk a little with thee.'" So the dead teacher and the living pupil walked together upon the sands of Hell. Although Dante's just mind obliged him to condemn his master as a sinner against Nature, his affectionate respect for Brunetto is great. "I held my head bowed," he writes, "as a man who goeth in reverence." "Within my memory is fixed," he said to the spirit, "(and now it pierceth my heart) the beloved, kind, paternal image of thee, as hour by hour in the world thou didst teach me how man may make himself eternal."

Canto xvi. tells how Dante and Virgil were accosted by three other souls in the same circle—Guido Guerra, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, and Jacopo Rusticucci—all Florentines, all lovers of their native land. They sought tidings of Florence, but Dante had only ill news to give them. The three spirits, "looking at one another as men look when they hear the truth," dispersed without a word.

Canto xvii. then opens. Virgil, leaning over the precipice which separated him and his companion from the next circle, called up the monster Geryon, the type of fraud. While Virgil parleyed with the beast, Dante inspected the souls of the usurers who are seated upon the glowing sand. Then Geryon carried the two poets into the circle below.

Canto xviii. describes their entrance into Malebolge. The first sinners they encountered were the pandars, whom demons were scourging with whips; further on they beheld the flatterers plunged in filth.

Canto xix. records the punishment of the simonists, who are buried head downwards, with only their legs above ground. The soles of their feet are on fire, and they writhe in agony. Dante spoke to one of the shades, whereupon a voice came out of the hole, saying: "Standest thou already there? standest thou already there, Boniface?" It was the spirit of Pope Nicholas III., who imagined that his successor, Boniface VIII., was come to join him in Hell. Dante, bending over the tortured soul, delivered a magnificent tirade against the avarice of the Church. "I pray thee, tell me now how much treasure did our Lord require of Peter when He gave the keys into his keeping? In truth He nothing said, only, 'Come after Me. . . .' Were it not that reverence for the great keys thou heldest in life preventeth me, I would use yet heavier words. . . . Ye have made unto yourselves gods of gold and silver. In what, then, do ye differ from the idolater? Only in this—that he worshippeth one idol, but ye an hundred."

Canto xx. tells how Dante wept to see the souls of the magicians deformed and twisted as

cealed in fire. Virgil explained that the deceitful souls of Ulysses and Diomed are tortured in one flame with a double tongue. Dante desired to talk with them, but Virgil bade him hold his peace. "Let me speak," he said, "... perhaps they may scorn your language, for they were Greeks." He conjured them, by the fame of the *Æneid*, to relate the manner of their death; "whereupon the greater horn of the ancient flame began to shudder and to murmur, like a fire that the wind attacketh. Then the top, moving back and forth, as though it were a tongue speaking, threw out a voice;" and Ulysses gave a poetical description of his last voyage and of the storm that overwhelmed his boat and crew.

Canto xxvii. introduces a new sufferer in the same circle. The soul of Guido da Montefeltro, detecting Virgil's Lombard accent, cried out to him from within the enwrapping flame: "O thou who speakest Lombard . . . let it not seem ill to thee to pause and talk with me. Behold, it seemeth not ill to me, although I burn! . . . Tell me if they have war or peace in Romagna, for I am from the mountains there. . . ." "My guide," says Dante, "touched me on the side, saying: 'Speak thou; this man is Latin.'" But the news "of the sweet Latin land" brought no comfort to the homesick soul, being, as always, a tale of strife and woe.

Cantos xxviii., xxix., and xxx. are the most



terrible of the *Inferno*. Dante let his imagination run riot, sparing no horrible detail. The sowers of scandal and schism are mangled by wounds and streaming with blood. One soul tore his own bosom open, saying: "Behold how I lacerate myself! Behold how is Mahomet rent!" Another with a split windpipe groaned: "Remember Pier di Medicina"; and one, "who had both hands cut off, raising the stumps in the foul air, so that the blood made his face all vile, cried out: 'Remember Mosca too. Oh, woe is me!'"

Dante next describes the diseased souls of the falsifiers. Hideous lepers prop themselves against each other; the lips of the dropsical are curled back in eternal thirst. "Oh misery! I crave a drop of water," said Adam of Brescia. "The little streams that fall down into the Arno from the green hills of Casentino dwell always in my mind . . . the memory of them parcheth me."

Canto xxxi. relates how Dante, having left the plague-pit, beheld what seemed great towers in the mist, but Virgil explained that they were giants. One of them babbled in a forgotten language; another, Antæus, took up the poets in his huge hands and set them down in the last circle, described in the three remaining cantos. Dante heard a voice say: "Take heed how thou goest; trample not . . . upon the heads of thy weary suffering brethren." Looking round, he saw that he walked upon a frozen



ake. Souls were imprisoned in the ice, with only their faces protruding. "I saw more than a thousand faces," he writes, "made purple by the cold." Further on he saw how one gnawed the head of another, "as a hungry man eateth bread," and, horror-stricken, he inquired the reason of such hatred. Whereupon the sinner "raised his mouth from the savage meal, wiping it upon the hair of the head he mangled," and related his tragic history. He was the traitorous Count Ugolino, and his victim was the traitorous Archbishop Ruggieri, who starved Ugolino and his sons and grandsons to death in Pisa's Tower of Famine. Therefore he pastures eternally on his enemy.

As Dante and Virgil continued their journey a voice cried out: "Oh, . . . remove the hard ice-veils from my face, that I may vent the pain, wherewith my heart is heavy, a little while ere my tears freeze again." "Tell me who thou art," said Dante. The spirit answered: "I am Friar Alberigo." Dante expressed astonishment to hear that the friar was already dead, but the shadow stated that as soon as a man committed treachery his soul was snatched away to judgment, his apparently living body becoming the home of a devil. This was evidently Dante's reading of the Psalmist's words: "And they shall go down alive into Hell." When the poor soul had made a full reply to all questioning, he prayed again: "Stretch forth now thy hand; open my eyes." "But," says Dante, "I did not open

them, for it was seemly to be discourteous to him."

The further the two companions went along the ice, the deeper were the souls plunged under the surface. Here in the last place of Hell brooded Lucifer, no longer the beautiful star of the morning, but a three-headed giant with bat's wings. His three mouths chewed the world's arch-traitors—Judas, Brutus, and Cassius. Virgil led his comrade up Lucifer's huge hip, whence they clambered into a rocky tunnel. Then, with a deep breath of relief, the two passed out of Hell. "Through a round hole I beheld again the lovely things that the sky holdeth, and then we came forth again to see the stars."

#### THE PURGATORIO.

Cantos i. to x. deal with Ante-purgatory, corresponding to Ante-hell.

The opening of this second *cantica* is full of holy peace. Cool winds blew down from the starry sky, and "a sweet colour of Oriental sapphire gathered in the pure air's serenity." Four stars shone in the south; "the heavens seemed rejoicing in their little flames."

As the poets walked on, they met the aged Cato, whose grey hair and beard fell over breast and shoulders.

"Who are ye . . . that flee from the eternal prison?" said he, . . . "Who hath been your lanthorn as ye came forth from the deep night

which maketh the eternal valley black for ever?"

Virgil laid hold on Dante, forcing him down upon his knees; reverently he explained to Cato that neither he nor his comrade was damned. "Let us go through thy seven kingdoms." Cato, mollified, gave permission, adding some instructions concerning purification from Hell's fumes, whereupon they continued their way. "The white dawn conquered the morning mists, which fled away, so that from afar I saw the trembling of the sea!" At the water's brink Virgil stooped, and, gathering up the "sweet dew," washed Dante's tear-stained cheeks and girded him with rushes, according to Cato's commands.

Dante then beheld a whiteness and light coming over the sea, which, when it approached, he perceived to be a boat full of souls, guided by a spirit with great white wings. "Bend, bend thy knees," cried Virgil; "here is the angel of God. Fold thy hands." "As the Divine bird came nearer to us," writes Dante, "he seemed even brighter. . . . There were more than an hundred spirits in the vessel, and with one voice they sang, 'In Exitu Israel de Ægypto.' . . . Then he signed them with the Holy Cross, whereupon they all threw themselves upon the strand, and he departed swiftly as he came."

"The new people" crowded round the poets, asking their way to the Purgatorial mountain; but Virgil explained that they were strangers

also. "The souls who perceived by my breathing that I was still alive, marvelling, grew pale. . . . I saw one of them press forward to embrace me with so great affection that it moved me to do the like. Oh! shadowy illusion! . . . Thrice I clasped my arms about him, and as many times drew them empty to my breast . . . whereat the spirit smiled . . . gently he bade me pause; then I knew who it was." It was the musician Casella, a friend of the old happy days in Florence. "As I loved thee in the mortal flesh, so do I love thee in my soul's freedom," said Casella. Dante besought him to sing as he was wont to do in the vanished years; and Casella sang one of Dante's own verses so melodiously that the souls listened spellbound, forgetting their search for the mountain, until Cato's voice rang out in sudden wrath: "What is this? Slow spirits . . . run ye to the hill." Then they all dispersed like a flock of doves, followed by Dante and Virgil.

When the two comrades reached the foot of the mountain they found it too steep to climb, and turned for help to the souls of the repentant excommunicate, whom they beheld approaching very slowly. The sun threw Dante's shadow on the ground before him, which amazed the spirits; wherefore he explained that he still possessed a mortal body. One of the souls cried out: "Turn thy face to me, and think if ever in the world thou sawest me." "I looked fixedly upon him," says Dante. "He



was yellow-haired and beautiful and of noble aspect. . . . When I had humbly denied ever having seen him . . . he smiling said: 'I am Manfred, grandson of the Empress Constance.'" He went on to relate how, through God's mercy, he had found salvation, in spite of having died outside the pale of the Church. These souls, having shown the two pilgrims a place in the rock where the ascent was easiest, departed. Dante climbed the steep rock with infinite fatigue, but "his sweet father," Virgil, helped him along the weary way, assuring him that the path would become easier further on. They beheld the souls of the slothful and late repentant lounging in the shadow of a rock. Dante recognised one of them, Belacqua, the lazy guitar-maker of Florence, who still sat and hugged his knees as he used to do in the world. Belacqua told him how the souls of the slothful are detained outside Purgatory's gate in punishment of their neglect.

Dante and Virgil next met the souls of the violently slain who, at the last moment, made their peace with God. These souls were singing the *Misereve*, but at the sight of a living man the chant died away in a long-drawn "Oh!" of astonishment. They so pressed round Dante, beseeching him to procure them prayers in the world, that he was obliged to push them aside, paving his way with promises. As he and his guide were once more alone, Virgil answered his questions regarding the efficacy of prayer, assuring him that all his doubts would be



solved by Beatrice, whom he would behold in Heaven.

As evening approached they met a solitary soul, who spoke not, but looked upon them like a lion in repose. Virgil asked him the way, but, instead of answer, the spirit questioned them concerning their life and country. "The sweet guide began: 'Mantua . . .' and the shade, gathering himself up, leaped at him . . . crying, 'Oh, Mantuan, I am Sordello of thy land!' and one embraced the other." Dante here makes a digression in his tale to point out the patriotism of these spirits who so loved their land, and he bewails the distracted state of Italy. "Oh! Italy . . . home of woe . . ." he writes. "Behold, miserable one . . . doth any part of thee enjoy peace?"

Sordello asked his countryman: "Who art thou?" "I am Virgil," was the reply, "and I lost Heaven for no guilt, save that I knew not the faith." Sordello, falling down, embraced Virgil's knees. "Oh! glory of the Latins," he said. "If I am worthy to hear thy words, tell me if thou comest from Hell?" "There is a place below, not torment-saddened, but dim," said Virgil sorrowfully, "where lamentation soundeth not in cries, but in sighing only. There dwell I with the little innocent children."

Sordello told them that they could not continue their ascent that night, but that he would guide them to a valley where they might safely pass the dark hours. He led them accordingly

to a grassy hollow in the rocks, where many-hued flowers perfumed the air. The shades of the negligent rulers sat there, singing the *Salve Regina*. Sordello named them to his comrades—Rudolph the Emperor and Ottocar, Philip III. of France and Henry of Navarre, Henry III. of England, and many others.

One of the souls rose, folded his hands, and, gazing towards the east, commenced to sing *Te Lucis Ante*. The other souls joined in, and the entire company chanted the hymn to the end with their eyes turned heavenward. Whereupon, as though in answer to their prayer, two angels descended. Their garments were green as little leaves in spring, and their great wings were green. They carried flaming swords with blunted tips. Dante could see their golden hair, but his eyes were dazzled by the brightness of their faces. These angels stood one on each side of the valley to defend it against the serpent that lurks there.

Dante and his spirit guides then entered the flowery place, and Dante joyfully recognised Nino dei Visconti, the noble judge. Once again the souls are struck with wonder on hearing that Dante is living. Again they ask his prayers. While he was speaking to the shade of Conrad Malaspina, the snake came gliding through the flowers, but the "celestial falcons" routed it.

In the dawn Dante fell asleep, and dreamed that he was seized in an eagle's talons and carried up into the sphere of fire, whereof the

burning awoke him. He found himself alone with Virgil on the mountain side above the valley. The faithful guide told him how St. Lucy came while he slept and bore him in her arms a little way along his journey. The comrades then saw before them the entrance into Purgatory. "I beheld a door, and three steps below it," says Dante. The first step was marble, the second step was of a dark cracked stone, and the topmost step was blood-red porphyry. These represent the three parts of the Sacrament of Penance—Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. An angel guarded the door. "His countenance," says Dante, "was such that I could not endure it. He held a naked sword in his hand. . . . I cast myself devoutly down at his holy feet; I besought him for his mercy's sake to open the door to me; but first he smote me thrice upon my bosom. He traced seven P's upon my forehead with his sword's point. 'Wash thou these wounds, when thou shalt be within,' he said." The seven P's are symbolical of the *sette peccata*, the seven deadly sins.

The angel drew a key of gold and one of silver from beneath his vesture, and unlocked the door. As Dante and Virgil passed through they heard an invisible choir singing the *Te Deum*.

Canto x. tells how the pilgrims found themselves upon a ridge of white marble, whereon were engraved pictures representing

examples of humility. Dante was admiring these when Virgil called his attention to a crowd of spirits who moved slowly towards them. These were the souls of the proud, expiating their sin by carrying upon their shoulders huge stones, which bow down the heads they held so high on earth.

Canto xi. begins with the beautiful paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, which the proud chanted as they approached. The travellers walked beside them, conversing with the once arrogant souls who are now so gentle. Dante, conscious of his pride, kept his own head bent as though he, too, carried a stone.

Canto xii. relates how Dante and Virgil, having left the burthened company, proceeded along a marble road. Beneath their feet were engraved pictures of pride, which Dante attentively studied. Then they met the Angel of Humility, whose "face seemed like a tremulous morning star." He stretched out his arms to them, and, opening wide his wings, told them which path to take. Heavenly voices sang, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and Dante discovered that one of the seven P's had been wiped from his temples, and that the ascent had become easier.

Cantos xiii. and xiv. describe the purgation of the envious. Dante and Virgil heard mysterious voices speaking words of brotherly



love. They beheld souls seated on the ground clothed in sackcloth, having their eyes stitched up with wire. He discoursed with the spirits of Guido del Duca and Rinier da Calboli, who lamented Italy's degeneracy. As he and his guide passed on the voices spoke words of envy, so that the souls might the more hate their sin.

Canto xv. recounts how the great light which shone round the Angel of Love forced Dante to shade his eyes. The voices sang "Blessed are the merciful," and as Dante passed on only five P's seamed his brow. Entering the next circle Dante had a vision in which he saw the Blessed Virgin reproaching the Child Jesus in the temple and other examples of gentleness. He had scarcely come out of his trance before he and his guide were wrapt in rolling smoke-clouds.

Canto xvi. records how Dante, guided by Virgil, walked with closed eyes through the acrid fog, wherein the hidden spirits of the wrathful chanted the *Agnus Dei*. The soul of Marco Lombardo called from the darkness, asking the travellers' names, and followed them a little way, discoursing with them. Dante asked him whether Italy's distracted state was caused by some ungracious mood of Heaven. Marco sighed deeply, observing: "Brother, the world is blind, and truly thou comest therefrom." He rebuked Dante for the foolish



notion, for of what use would free-will be if actions were determined by fate? This was the cause of Italy's woe: that the Pope strove too much after temporal power, neglecting his spiritual mission.

"O Marco mio," said Dante . . . "now I discern why the sons of Levi were excluded from inheritance."

When the spirit left them Dante was again rapt in visions, this time of examples of wrath.

In the beginning of Canto xvii. they met the Angel of Mildness, but Dante could no more look upon him than a man could look on the sun. The angel smote him on the forehead, thereby wiping out another P. "Blessed are the peacemakers" said a voice, and the pilgrims passed on to new scenes. The rest of this canto and part of Canto xviii. recount Virgil's discourse of the nature of love. The guide had hardly ceased to speak when the two companions were startled by the sound of running feet, and the souls of the slothful rushed past them, crying out with tears: "Haste, haste! let not time be lost through little love." As Dante puzzled over the strange sight darkness closed in upon them, and overcome by weariness, he slept.

Canto xix. relates how Dante dreamed of the foul and hideous siren who yet charmed him with her sweet song. He thought that a

fair and holy lady (possibly Beatrice, symbolical of celestial wisdom), came from Heaven to rescue him from the thrall of sensual pleasures, and awoke to hear Virgil calling him to resume his journey. Rapt in thought he followed his master. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," said the Angel of Zeal, spreading his swan-like wings and wiping another P from Dante's brow.

The travellers next beheld the souls of the avaricious and the prodigal, prone, face downwards on the ground. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust," they sighed. Dante spoke to one of them, who replied: "Know that I was a successor of Peter." It was Adrian V., who only wore the Papal mantle for one month, but who learned, even in that short space, how hard it was to keep that mantle undefiled. Dante knelt beside the spirit in deepest reverence. "Why do you bow down?" said Adrian. "Because of your dignity," said Dante. "Rise up, brother," replied the soul; "we are all fellow-servants."

Cantos xx. and xxi. continue the description of the same circle. Leaving the shade of the Pope, the comrades addressed the soul of Hugh Capet, who, with tears, was praising the poverty of God's saints. He condemned the wickedness of France, who held Christ's Vicar captive, and informed the two that towards nightfall their chant in praise of poverty would turn to abuse of avarice.

Then Dante and Virgil departed from thence, and as they continued their climb, the mountain shook as with an earthquake. A great shout went up from all the souls in Purgatory : "*Gloria in excelsis Deo !*" "We remained motionless and doubting," says Dante, "like the shepherds who first heard that song."

As they went on their way, amazed, a spirit approached them, saying : "My brothers, may God give ye peace." Virgil answered : "May the True Court place thee in peace . . . it bindeth me in everlasting exile." The soul marvelled at these words, until Virgil explained that he came from Limbo, and that Dante was still living. He then asked the spirit the reason of the mountain's trembling. The shade told him that whenever a soul, completely purified from sin, prepared to ascend to Heaven, the mountain quaked with joy, and all the souls cried out in thanksgiving. He himself is purified, and is on his way to Paradise. On Virgil asking his name, he revealed that he was Statius, a poet of Toulouse, who lived and died at Rome in the first century. When he told them of his deep admiration for the "*Æneid*," not knowing to whom he spoke, the two looked at one another, and Dante laughed ; but Virgil said : "Hold thy peace." "Why showest thou this flash of laughter?" inquired Statius. Dante received permission to tell the soul the truth, whereupon Statius fell down, embracing Virgil's feet. "Brother, what dost thou?" said Virgil ;

"for thou art shadow, and shadow thou beholdest."

In Canto xxii. the three met the Angel of Liberality, who wiped another wound from Dante's forehead. Virgil and Statius walked on in front, discoursing of antiquity, and Dante followed them, intently listening. Statius told Virgil how the study of the "*Æneid*" had made him first a poet and then a Christian, because of the Mantuan singer's prophecies concerning the true faith. Virgil described to him the nobly mournful state of the souls in Limbo. They next came to a fair tree covered with fruit, beside which a spring of water flowed, spraying the leaves. A voice among the foliage said: "From this food ye shall fast," and then recounted examples of holy temperance.

Canto xxiii. is devoted to the gluttonous, worn skeleton-thin with hunger and thirst, in view of the fruit and water that they may not touch. Here Dante met his friend Forese Donati, with whom he had once fallen into sin. Forese contrasted the virtues of his widow, Nella, with the vice of the Florentine women, to whom he predicted retribution.

Canto xxiv. tells how Statius named many of these souls to Dante. He conversed particularly with Bonaguinta, a Lucchese painter, who, having heard of Dante's poetic



fame while still living, inquired of him concerning his "sweet new style" of verse. "I am one," replied Dante, "who taketh note when Love breatheth within me, and I write down what he dictateth to me."

Leaving Bonaguinta, the three came to another fruit-laden tree, from which voices came forth, recounting tales of gluttony. The Angel of Temperance, clad in glowing colours like glass and metal in the furnace, and breathing an odour as of May winds, waved a wing across Dante's forehead, healing another of the wounds.

The first part of Canto xxv. is occupied with Statius' discussion upon generation and death. Then follows the description of the purging of the lustful souls who run through flames, singing the praises of chastity.

Canto xxvi. records how Dante beheld two troops of souls meeting as they ran, embracing one another in passing, and crying out examples of lust. He spoke to one of them, Guido Guinicelli, a famous love-poet who died in 1276. Dante expressed his admiration for Guido's lyrics, saying that he was the father of all those who ever used sweet and tender rimes of love. But the spirit, all humility, disclaimed the fame which Dante thrust upon him, pointing out another soul, who was, he said, "a better forger of his mother tongue." This was Arnould Daniel, a troubadour of Provence.



Arnault's reply to Dante's salutation is written in beautiful Provençal, without a break in the *terza rima*, notwithstanding the sudden change of language.

"Jeu sui Arnaut, que plor e van cantan,"  
he says.

"Consiros vei la passada forlor,  
E vei jausen lo jorn qu'esper, denan."

"I am Arnaut, who weep and go a-singing.  
I see in thought my past folly, and I rejoice to  
see before me the day for which I hope."

Canto xxvii. recounts the meeting with the glad Angel of Chastity, who bade them pass through the flame, that being the only road to Heaven. Dante shrank back in terror, and Virgil's encouragements availed nothing until he said: "Behold, son, this is a wall between thee and Beatrice." Immediately Dante flung himself into the fire. To comfort him in the burning pain, the "sweet father" cried out: "I seem to see her eyes already." The voice of an angel called from the other side, guiding them: "Come, ye blessed of my Father." It was night when Dante emerged from the flame, and exhausted, he fell asleep. He dreamed of Leah, type of the active life, culling flowers in a meadow, and heard her sing of Rachel, type of the contemplative life. When he awoke, Virgil and Statius were already risen, and prepared to continue the journey. Virgil turned his kind eyes on Dante with loving

words, which the latter did not yet recognise as a farewell. The three beheld before them a perfumed forest full of blossoms and singing birds, but the river Lethe flowed between them and the wood. Among the trees wandered the soul of Matilda, Duchess of Tuscany, singing for holy joy. From the other side of the river she spoke to them concerning the winds, waters and plants of this the Earthly Paradise.

Canto xxix. describes the Divine pageant which Dante saw approaching through the forest. First appeared pennons of rainbow light, streaming from seven candles in candlesticks like great gold trees, which were borne in front of the four-and-twenty elders, iris-crowned, who chanted hymns to the Virgin. These were followed by the four beasts of Ezekiel's vision, and by a griffon drawing a triumphal car, around which seven maidens, typifying the theological and cardinal virtues, danced. Luke and Paul, John and the authors of the Epistles, walked behind. The procession halted in front of Dante.

Canto xxx. records how a crowd of singing angels suddenly appeared scattering flowers upon the chariot, whereupon a veiled lady rose among the cloud of blossoms and descended from the car. Before he saw her face Dante knew by his heart's trembling that here was Beatrice. He turned to share the awful joy with his guide, but finding Virgil had gone, felt

suddenly lonely. Beatrice, regal under her veil, greeted Dante sternly, and his heart grew cold within him. "*In te, Domine, speravi,*" sang the angels; and at the sound of their compassionate voices he wept. But the lady, unmoved, reproached him for his faithlessness to her; for the non-fulfilment of his young life's promise.

Canto xxxi. begins with Dante's acknowledgment of his sin. "Material things," said he in a voice almost inaudible with tears, "with their false pleasure, led my steps astray as soon as thy face was hidden." Then Matilda led Dante down into the river of forgetfulness and helped him to swim across. Cleansed and forgiven, he stood before Beatrice, who unveiled that he might see her beauty; and as Dante gazed upon her his ten years' hunger was appeased.

Cantos xxxii. and xxxiii. are essentially allegorical. Dante, with Statius, who had followed, came with the procession to the barren Tree of Knowledge, which broke into purple bloom at the approach of the Griffon—emblem of Christ. Dante sank into a bewildered sleep, awaking to find that most of the spirits had departed with the Griffon. Only the seven nymphs bearing the candlesticks, Matilda, and Statius remained with Beatrice. Dante saw visions emblematic of the Church's decadence, after which he walked further beside Beatrice,

who now graciously discoursed to him of Church and Empire. Since tasting the waters of Lethe he had forgotten all his sin, but he and Statius must drink of one more fount before they can endure the beauty of heaven. When strengthened by the waters of Eunoë they became "pure and ready to ascend to the stars."

## THE PARADISO.

The *Commedia* is less interesting as it becomes more transcendental. "Trasumanar significar *per verba* non si poria," wrote Dante himself in the beginning of the third *cantica*, that is, "It is not possible to express the superhuman in words." He cannot make us feel his raptures; the flights of his soul leave us far behind. This is why the *Paradiso* is the least read and least admired of the three poems.

The visions of Purgatory merge imperceptibly into those of Heaven.

Cantos i. and ii. of the *Paradiso* tell how Beatrice gazed full on the sun, and Dante gazed on her. They heard the music of the spheres, and by the magnetism of God's grace they were drawn up through the circle of fire into the milky Heaven of the Moon.

Canto iii. contains a beautiful description of the faint pearl-pale smiling faces which appeared to Dante. These were the souls of



the blessed who were unable to fulfil their vows of chastity. Piccarda and the Empress Constance, who were both torn from the cloister, discoursed with him of the love of God.

Beatrice then led Dante higher, supporting him, explaining theological doctrines, rejoicing in his spiritual progress.

Cantos v., vi., and vii. describe the Heaven of Mercury where the once ambitious souls are consumed with ecstasies of love. Looking like sparks in their glorious auras, they dance around the planet singing "*Hosanna*." Among them Dante beheld the soul of Justinian, who explained the history of the Roman Empire.

Canto viii. and ix. record how Dante and his guide reached Venus, the Heaven of Love, where Beatrice glowed with added beauty. The brilliant souls of the purified lovers left their cosmic dance to greet the mortal lover. Dante distinguished Carlo Martello, Cunizza, Rahab, and many others.

Cantos x. to xv. tell of the Heaven of the Sun, occupied by the prudent. When Dante was drawn up into the golden light, Beatrice said: "Give thanks, give thanks to the sun of the angels." Whereupon Dante felt his heart so filled with love of God that for a moment he forgot his lady. Beatrice rejoiced at this progress, but he soon turned again to contemplate the "splendid laughter of her eyes." Twelve



souls circled around the two, dancing and singing mystic hymns to the Trinity. These did not wait to be asked their names, but pressed by desire to satisfy all Dante's wishes, answered his unspoken question. Here, with many others, are Thomas Aquinas, Albert Magnus, Solomon, and Bede. Presently twelve more dancing souls formed a ring outside the first company. The shade of a Dominican praised St. Francis, and the shade of a Franciscan praised St. Dominic. Dante, dazzled by the lights and the melody, wondered how the resurrected flesh would be able eternally to endure such beauty. The voice of Solomon reassured him. The soul, when united to its glorified body, will be a more perfect thing than the naked spirit, consequently more pleasing to God, who will pour forth increased grace upon it. Dante faintly perceived a third circle of spirits forming round the first two circles as he and Beatrice rose up into Mars — the heaven of the courageous, described in Cantos xv., xvi., and xvii.

Athwart the red star gleamed a great white cross, whereon the figure of Christ appeared like a lightning flash. All along the cross hovered the souls of God's warriors singing a triumphant hymn. Silence fell as Beatrice and her pilgrim approached, and one of the spirits darted from his place to welcome them, pouring forth his thanks to God for Dante's safe arrival. "I beseech thee, living topaz," said Dante to him, "let me know thy name." "Oh, my leaf . . . ." said the spirit, "I was thy root."

It was the soul of Cacciaguida, the crusader, Dante's great-great-grandfather. He discoursed with his descendant of the good old days in Florence, before the city was sin-polluted; and prophesied Dante's exile. He bade him describe in poetry the wondrous worlds he had seen, even though the narrative must anger many. "Thy song shall be as the wind that buffeteth the highest peaks," said Cacciaguida.

Cantos xviii. to xx. describe the silvery Heaven of Jove. Here Dante saw the souls of the just kings, who, clustering together in the air, made of themselves the figure of an eagle. To Dante's wonder, the beak opened and with one voice the souls sang praises of justice as though it was the eagle singing. The spirits reproved Dante for questioning God's judgments, which are above all created comprehension. Then the eagle gave forth a melody, first like heavenly flutes and then like the tinkling of waters, after which the beak opened again announcing the names of the souls who composed the figure. Dante was amazed to hear that two heathens were among these saints, Ripheus and Trajan, but the eagle explained that by God's grace they both had received the gift of faith before dying; Ripheus trusting in the Messiah to come, Trajan believing in Christ, through Gregory's prayer.

Cantos xxi. and xxii. deal with Saturn, the Heaven of the Contemplative. Beatrice, wh-

had been growing ever more beautiful as she mounted nearer God, became grave lest Dante's finite heart should be unable to endure her smile's increasing loveliness. Dante beheld a golden ladder stretching up so far that he could not see its end. Thousands of flame-like spirits went up and down the steps, but, to Dante's surprise, in silence. Peter Damian, who was near him, explained the reason. The melody of this high Heaven would be over-sweet for mortal ears.

The saint rebuked Dante for seeking to know the mystery of predestination, which is eternally locked in God's bosom, and went on to anathematise the degeneracy of the prelates. Then all the shining souls coming round Dante raised such a mighty cry that, growing pale with fear, he turned to Beatrice for succour. And his gentle lady comforted him as a mother soothes her child. "Dost thou not know that thou art in Heaven? And dost thou not know that Heaven is all-holy?" How would he have borne her smile, she asked, or the spirits' song, if a single cry affected him thus? The cry was but a prayer calling down vengeance on the sins of the Church. Beatrice directed his attention once more to the souls, and St. Benedict pointed out the spirits of Macarius and Romoaldus among his comrades. Then all the saints rushed up the ladder like a whirlwind, followed by Dante and his guide.

Heaven, where the two now ascended. "Behold," said Beatrice, "the army of Christ's triumph." And Dante gazed on thousands of the souls of the redeemed and saw Christ face to face in the glory. Beatrice smiled then at her pupil, for the vision of our Lord had strengthened him to bear all lesser things. She then bade him look on the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles, who are the mystic rose and the lilies of God's garden. All Dante's mind was rapt in contemplation of Mary, 'il bel fior,' when Gabriel darted to her side singing, "I am angelic Love," and began a hymn in her praise, which was echoed by all the hosts of Heaven.

Beatrice, by her great love for Dante, called St. Peter forth from the celestial throng to question him concerning faith. Dante made a full profession of faith in the hearing of all the saints. Beatrice then summoned St. James, to whom Dante declared his hope, and finally appeared St. John, the beloved Apostle, who so blinded Dante with glory that for the moment he could no longer see Beatrice. St. John announced that he died like other men, and that there was no truth in the ancient tradition that he passed living into everlasting bliss.

When he had examined the pilgrim concerning his love, there came a fresh outburst of hymning from the celestial choir, and Dante once more beheld Beatrice. The soul of Adam then discoursed with the poet concern-



early ages of the world. Suddenly Dante was amazed to see how the glory round St. Peter changed to an angry red, the same sullen hue spreading to all the lights of Paradise, and the great Apostle explained that it was the evil conduct of the modern Popes which thus filled Heaven with shame and wrath. "He who on earth hath usurped my place, my place, my place," thundered St. Peter, "hath made my burial-ground a conduit for blood and filth."

Then the celestial court rose up into the Swiftest Heaven, described in Cantos xxviii. and xxx., and after a little the two followed them. Dante saw nine concentric rings, formed by the nine orders of angels, dancing for joy around a central light, which is God's throne. Beatrice discoursed of the angelic nature, and then she and Dante ascended imperceptibly into the Empyrean.

Cantos xxx. to xxxiii. tell of this Heaven of Heavens. Here space is annihilated, and Dante looked on the whole court of the saints. "Into the yellow of the Sempiternal Rose which extendeth rank upon rank, exhaling perfume of praise. . . . Beatrice drew me and said: 'Behold, how great is the convent of white robes.'" The lady pointed out a vacant throne awaiting Henry the Emperor, and while Dante was absorbed in contemplation of the celestial flower, she left him for her own seat of glory. St. Bernard took her place



beside Dante and explained the divisions of Heaven, naming many of the saints to him. He pointed out the Virgin Mary, beautiful and joyful beyond description, shining with a soft light like that of dawn. To her Beatrice and Bernard prayed that Dante might receive strength to endure the unveiled majesty of God. Mary gave him grace, and the eyes of his soul were opened. No words could express what he then saw. Like the painter who depicted Christ with the averted head, Dante attempts no portrait of the Almighty. He had an indescribable vision of holiness and light and beauty, and the sight filled his heart with an abiding sweetness.

Here the *Commedia* ends, for Dante could tell the world no more.

#### DANTE'S MINOR WORKS

Perhaps the most important of the minor works is the *Convito*, or *Banquet*, a philosophical treatise. Dante intended the work to contain fifteen books, but of these he only completed four. It was the first work of the kind ever written in Italian, and Dante was so impressed by the audacity of the innovation that he filled the beginning chapters with apologies for not having written it in Latin. Each book commences with a poem in praise of Philosophy, who is represented as a beautiful lady. Then the literal, the allegorical, and the spiri-

meaning of the poem are elaborately explained. The verses are not so good as those of the *New Life*; indeed, the whole would be rather wearisome did it not include several interesting passages of autobiography, which have already been quoted here. The *Convito* was written after exile, but the precise date is uncertain.

The Latin political treatise, *De Monarchia*, which was probably composed during the descent of Henry VII. into Italy, contains three books. It is an attempt to resolve the burning question of the relative positions of Pope and Emperor. Dante would fain see the Roman Emperor all-supreme in power, bowing only to the spiritual lordship of the Pope. The latter should confine his administrations to the affairs of the Church.

*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a Latin work in praise of the vulgar tongue, is in two books. Many commentators suppose it to have been written about the same time as the *De Monarchia*. In the first book Dante declares the Italian language to be nobler than Latin, and tells how he desires to find the purest and highest form of *Volgare*. In the second book he gives rules for Italian versification.

Dante's less important lyrical poems are collected under the title of *Canzoniere*. Some of these belong to the same period as the *Vita Nuova*, and have for their theme the loveliness

of Beatrice. Others are in praise of Philosophy and appertain to the *Convito*; others, again, such as the *Canzone* of the three allegorical ladies, date from Dante's exile. Two Latin eclogues are also extant, which were composed during the last years at Ravenna.

There are ten existing epistles ascribed to Dante, some of which have already been quoted in the first part of this book. Most of them deal with political events, but the tenth and last is a dedication of the *Paradiso* to the great Ghibelline, Can Grande della Scala.

## EPILOGUE

IN life Dante was denied the fame to which he was so justly entitled, but he was greatly glorious in death. Fifty years after he was laid in the tomb his name was widely known, even in far England. In Italy his poem of the three worlds was read from the pulpits as a holy book. His picture was painted among those of the saints upon the walls of the Florentine cathedral. He was known as the "*Divino Poeta*." His comedy became the *Divina Commedia*.

Now that six centuries have passed since Dante lived and wrote, he is more than ever honoured. His fame grows with the years, for he had that best of all gifts for a writer—the deep sincerity, the grip on truth which makes a work immortal.





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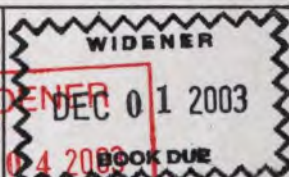
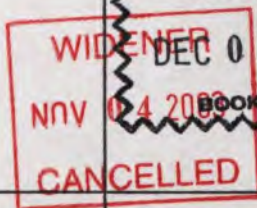
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